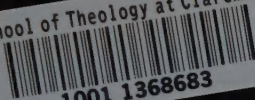


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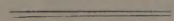
CHRIST THE WAY.

AND OTHER SERMONS.

BY

REV. A. FÜRST D.D.,

STRASBURG, ALSACE.



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CHRIST THE WAY

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THIS VOLUME OF SERMONS

IS DEDICATED

To the Memory of my Dearly-beloved Wife,

MARIA PERCIVAL FÜRST,

WHO, BY HER CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ACTIVITY, HAS BEEN
A GREAT BLESSING AND COMFORT TO MANY,
JEWS AND GENTILES.

REST FROM THY LABOURS, REST,
SOUL OF THE JUST SET FREE,
BLEST BE THY MEMORY, AND BLEST
THY BRIGHT EXAMPLE BE.

ERRATA

- Page 152, line 16. Read "brought" instead of "wrought "
- „ 169, „ 12. Read "and at all events" instead of "and all events."
- „ 169, „ 17. Read "happens" instead of "history."
- „ 175, „ 8. Read "paramount" instead of "permanent "
- „ 176, „ 27. Read "on no account" instead of "in no account."
- „ 186, last line. Read "obsolete" instead of "absolute."

P R E F A C E .

PREFACES ought to be short, if meant to be read. Mine is very short, for I have very little to say. The Sermons I venture to offer to the public have been delivered in a foreign country to a mixed congregation, consisting mostly of students and tourists from Great Britain and America. They have been dedicated to the memory of my beloved wife, for it was her approval of them that encouraged me to publish them. May they win the approval of the Christian public also, and be the means of promoting true and heartfelt religion—the religion of Christ—among them.

A. FÜRST, D.D.

STRASBURG (ALSACE),

FEBRUARY 3RD, 1883.

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I.

Christ, the Way.

JOHN XIV. 6.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."

I.—Never were more weighty and important words compressed into one short sentence, than our text contains. It conveys to us a clear statement uttered by Christ Himself, as to what He is to all men at all times. We have, in fact, in this single sentence, the most prominent principles of His gospel forcibly expressed. Christ has, on various occasions, divulged the secret of His origin and being, spoken of the close and intimate relation that existed between Him and the Father that sent Him, and made known the kind of work that was assigned to Him to do among men. His appearance among men, the claims He advanced, the works He performed, the truths He promulgated, very naturally provoked all manner of opinions respecting Him. When, on one occasion, He asked His disciples: "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" they replied: "Some say, John the Baptist; some Elijah; and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." All these different opinions in circulation about Him, are unmistakable indications that there were, among the Jews even then, at least some earnest and inquiring minds, anxious to understand, if possible, the strange and perplexing phenomena

the person of Christ presented to them. When we come to know the conflicting opinions that were advanced about Christ both by friend and foe, and when we bear in mind how perplexed and puzzled His most devoted followers were on the same subject, we cannot wonder at seeing Christ availing Himself of every fitting opportunity to let the people know the whole truth respecting Himself. He was well aware that the testimony He had to bear regarding Himself, His office, and work by far transcended man's natural capabilities of comprehension, and consequently would and must provoke even the fiercest opposition against Him. But as a spiritual King He relied on spiritual forces at the command and disposition of Him who sent Him, and was desirous to aid honest and truth-loving men by His Spirit, to come to an understanding of the mysteries of Himself and His kingdom. Hence Christ expressly declared: "No man can come to Me, except the Father who sent Me draw him." Drawn to Christ will every spiritually-minded man or woman be, that feels the crushing weight of sin on his or her heart and conscience, and yearns after reconciliation and communion with God the Father. Drawn to Christ will be all seriously disposed men or women, who realize the solemnity and responsibility of life, and are anxious that it should be a proper preparation for the life to come. "The natural man," however, says the apostle Paul, "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged." Hence, when Christ enforces merely moral principles and precepts, the natural

man may be willing to receive them and be able to judge as to their intrinsic value. He may, on account of their goodness and usefulness, be loud in praise of Him, and assign Him an honourable place among the many eminent teachers of mankind, or perhaps go as far as some of the Jews did, in saying that He was one of the prophets. The natural man may possibly go thus far and no further in his concessions. We cannot reasonably expect of him that he should go further, and must be prepared to hear him decry all other things respecting Christ as being foolishness to him. A spiritual King, as Christ undoubtedly is, has, however, a right to demand as the first thing necessary and requisite, in order to become a faithful and worthy citizen of His kingdom, that man should be spiritually-minded, and anxious to know the way of salvation. And it is to "such as mind the things of the Spirit" that Christ makes the emphatic declaration: "*I am* the light of the world! *I am* the bread of life! *I am* the good shepherd! *I am* the way, the truth, and the life! *I am* the resurrection and the life!" The spiritually-minded will be drawn to Christ by an irresistible power when He thus discloses the mysteries of His spiritual kingdom, for they "so mind the things of the Spirit." But those that "are of the flesh, and do mind the things of the flesh," can have no taste or liking for spiritual truth. As they are in enmity against God, they will also be in enmity against His Son, whom He has sent. To the testimony Christ bore as to His being and work they will answer like the carnally-minded Jews of old, in the words: "Thou bearest witness of Thyself; Thy witness

is not true." These Jews were utterly incapable of understanding Christ, nor were they willing to come to a clear understanding respecting Him. It is an indisputable fact, verified by every day's experience, that to be able to judge correctly of spiritual things, man must be spiritually-minded ; he must have "the mind of the Spirit." The natural man, the man of the mind of flesh, will tell us with a haughty air of self-sufficiency, that he cannot see "the light of the world," that he feels no hunger for "the bread of life," that the life he now has is all-sufficient for him, and that he needs no one to care for his soul. We may believe him that such is, alas ! the case, but we have a right to demand of him not to presume to judge spiritual things, for which he is utterly incapable. It is to the spiritual-minded, who are anxious to know the way to the Father ; who struggle after divine light and truth emanating from Him and effecting a new heavenborn life destined for heaven, that Christ makes the joyful announcement : "I am the way, the truth, and the life ; no one cometh unto the Father, but by Me."

II.—The most important part of the gospels are the utterances of Christ, in which He discloses to us the mysterious relation He sustains both to His Father and to mankind. He claims for Himself a position and authority among men, and over men's highest and best interests, never before advanced by any founder of a religion. He uses a variety of metaphors to illustrate the spiritual power and efficacy of His own person, when brought into intimate union with believing souls, that man may know and under-

stand who He is and what He accomplishes in and through them. There have been great and good men, who have endeavoured, to the best of their ability and knowledge, to point out to struggling, anxious souls the road to heaven, the means by which they may appease an offended Deity and be again restored to His favour. These well-meaning men inculcated maxims of morality, set forth principles of religion, and prescribed a code of religious ceremonies and observances, and promised all that lived and acted in strict harmony with their teachings and injunctions an ultimate entrance into bliss. They indeed spoke with authority, as if delegated by God for their particular missions, for, had they not done this, they would probably never have found a willing ear. Some indeed went so far as to pretend to be a part of the Deity Himself; others again laid claim to be considered as prophets or religious teachers; but all required obedience to their utterances and teachings as a condition for obtaining the favour and blessings of the Deity. They all more or less felt themselves called upon to point out a road to heaven, and, having done so, they considered it their duty to admonish men: "This is the way, walk ye in it." Not one, however, has, to our knowledge, raised so high a claim as to declare "I am the way." And yet Christ has done so in the words of our text. He did not say, "I have taught you the way to the Father, pointed out to you the road to heaven, walk ye in it!" He did not even say, "I am *a* way," for had He done so we might have been led to think there were other ways leading to God and to eternity besides His own, and we

might then have felt at liberty to choose one of the many we preferred to walk in. And in giving preference to any particular way we should have been justified in making a distinction between Him who pointed out to us the way and the way itself. But Christ clearly and distinctly declares, "I am *the* way, no one cometh unto the Father but by Me." This excludes all other ways suggested and defended by philosophers, moralists, or religious teachers, by worldly wise or self conceited men, whatever merits their respective ways may have. This solemn annunciation made by Christ leaves man no other alternative than to walk in the way by which we may come to the Father, or, if refusing to avail ourselves of the proffered way, we cannot expect safely to reach the Father. Every other way but that Christ speaks of is, by implication, declared as misleading man, as not leading him to God. We must frankly confess that this is probably the boldest and most startling assertion ever made, and from the mouth of any but Christ it would have been considered the ravings of a diseased mind. And yet coming from Christ it does not even surprise us: we rather expect it. It harmonizes so well with all we know of Him and His mission, with His character, power, and influence. He who lived such a sinless, unselfish, and self-sacrificing life, and taught men such high and lofty lessons of religion and morality, He it is, who, bearing witness of Himself, as to who He is and what He effects in believing souls, makes such and similar disclosures of Himself. Can we trust Him, when He makes such extraordinary supernatural claims? Might we

not set aside His personal pretensions, and keep exclusively to His moral teachings, and to such religious principles as are separated from His person? If we are honest and truth-loving it will be utterly impossible to reject the one and accept the other, for Christ Himself has made it impossible for us to separate His person from His teaching. He everywhere declares that in His religion He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, or as in our text, "the way, the truth, and the life." Christianity is in reality Christ Himself, and a true Christian is he who, by faith and love, is united to Him and leads a Christian life. His first apostles, with the exception of Judas, trusted Him, placed implicit confidence in the testimony He bore to Himself, and chose Him as the way to the Father. They became better, holier, and godlier men than they were before, or could have been without their close spiritual union with Christ. They were more zealous and devoted to the cause of true religion and humanity than this earth ever witnessed before, but has witnessed ever since, and is witnessing still in Christ's obedient and faithful disciples. These humble and self-denying followers of Christ went courageously and hopefully everywhere with the glad tidings that "a new and living way to the Father" had at last been opened, and pointing to the everlasting and interceding Christ they boldly declared, "This is the way, walk ye in it, for it is the way of holiness, the unclean shall not pass over it."

III.—"I am the way, the truth and the life, no one cometh to the Father, but by Me," is Christ's message

to struggling, sinful humanity. It is the message of salvation and reconciliation, containing the promise of a divine life, that is never ending, to all who sincerely adopt it. We believe that the greatest stress in this remarkable utterance of Christ, is meant to be laid on the first part, where He makes the declaration: "I am the way!" He thereby asserts that He Himself is the only safe and true way that leadeth believing and obedient men to the Father. And if He is in reality and truth the way to the Father, then it follows of necessity that He is the truth, which in religion must be considered of the greatest importance to know and act upon. And *that* way and *that* truth, which bring man into close relationship to his God, open up to him a new and living channel of communication between God and him, through which the treasures of heaven are transmitted to him. "The way, the truth and the life" are, in fact, the three divinely appointed steps in the ladder by which heaven is united with earth, believing man with his merciful God, and through which he ultimately enters the eternal abode prepared for him. This seems to us the clear meaning of Christ's revelation of Himself in relation to His people. The question still to be answered is: In what sense are we to take this extraordinary announcement of Christ made in the words: "I am the way!" We know, well enough, for what purpose a way or road is made, and can appreciate the great advantages a country derives when intersected by them. But how shall we understand the mystical saying of Christ: "I am the way"? We think we shall not fail in correctly interpreting it, when we say, that

Christ meant that His whole life, spent on behalf of mankind, from the cradle to the cross, during which He lived in the closest union with His Father for the spiritual benefit of man, is to be to His followers the way, which, as it had led Him to the Father, would, through Him, certainly lead us also to Him, Who by faith in Christ has again become our Father. We must bear in mind, that Christ uttered these soul-stirring words of our text with the certain prospect of His approaching death, which would effect His return to His Father. Thomas was perplexed, hearing Him speak of going to His Father and there preparing a place for His people, so that where He is, there they may be. Thomas seems not to have perceived what way Christ was speaking of, nor whither it was really leading to. To remove this ignorance and uncertainty Christ made known to him, and through him to all men at all times, that He Himself, who was on the point of returning to His Father, was *the way* that leadeth to Him. His life, as it proceeded from God, led to God, and as it was spent on behalf of man it becomes ours by a living faith in Him. A life of faith and love, lived by union with the everliving, and everloving Saviour, is the way that leads to the Father, to everlasting life. This certainly is a *new*, but it is also a *living* way, leading to endless, blissful life. United to Christ by a living faith, we shall be able, by God's grace, to walk even as He walked. A way is made not for meditation or talking about it, but to be walked in, to be used. If we are really anxious to come to our Father in heaven, to have habitual intercourse with Him, and obtain all the spiritual

blessings and comforts we need, Christ assures us that it can only be done through Him. If we can honestly and truly say with the Apostle Paul: "Not that I live, but Christ liveth in me," then we may be sure that we are really walking in the way that leadeth to the Father, and are constantly brought nearer our eternal home. O, that all men would know and choose this new and living way to walk in, in newness of life, for it is "the way of holiness, the unclean shall not pass over it." We are all pilgrims, we all have to move on day by day and are always brought nearer to the time when we may be called away. If we take our own way or any other way but Christ's way, we shall not only fail to realize our high calling here on earth, but we shall not reach "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." Before the coming of Christ men may have been in doubt and perplexity as to the road to the Father and to eternal life, but since His appearance here on earth we are not left in ignorance and doubt as to the way in which we ought to walk. Alas! it is very sad to think that there are many men, even bearing the name of Christ, who are still perplexed about this soul-saving road. We are not surprised to hear from unbelievers that every man can be saved or come to the Father in his own particular way, but we are surprised to hear a Church asserting that out of her pale, there is no salvation, as if Christ had said that a particular Church is the way to the Father. O, how difficult and perplexing it is for those, ignorant of the gospel of Christ, shut up by ecclesiastical presumption, to find the only true and living way to the Father! No creed,

however correct and scriptural, and certainly no ritualism however captivating to our senses, can bring us to the Father. And because men prefer their own way instead of Christ's, "the new and living way," we have religious dissensions and quarrels, and witness the humiliating spectacle of men bearing the name of Christ, but resembling Him in little or nothing. The confession of Christ pledges us to walk in His way, to be of the same mind as He was, to be meek and lowly of heart, to love divine light and truth, to lead an unselfish, self-denying life, and thus be a praise to God and a blessing to our fellow men. "He that saith he abideth in Him," says John, "ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked."

II.

Taking Care of the Heart.

PROVERES IV. 23.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence ; for out of it are the issues of life."

I.—The correct rendering of our text would be : " Above all other things that are to be cared for, take care of thy heart, for out of it are the issues of life." The prevailing opinion among the ancient Hebrews was, that the heart was the chief source of the physical, as well as of the spiritual and ethical, the higher as well as the lower life of man. In their view, it was considered not only the main source of physical life, but the seat of the affections or sensibilities ; yea, of the understanding and the will. In our text the wise ~~king~~ speaks of the heart in its ethical and spiritual significance, especially of its moral and religious condition, and demands of us, that above all the duties, which life in its manifoldness imposes upon us, we ought to pay the greatest attention to the cultivation of the heart, " for out of it are the issues of life " As is the fountain, so the streams, and the Hebrew would say, as is the heart, so will the disposition, the character, the life of man be. What important functions then has our heart to perform in life, and what a high and responsible position is assigned to it in our marvellous mechanism ! No wonder that we are so often reminded and exhorted in divine writ to take care of our

heart. It decides for or against certain views and opinions, and if they are opposed to its prejudices or likings, it will often stubbornly refuse to accept them, in spite of the clearest evidence and the most logical demonstration. It can influence our will in such a manner as to prevent us from carrying out the most necessary action, and thus prompt us to act against our better knowledge and conviction. It has certain inclinations, to which it most readily yields; it has certain predilections for, and prejudices against, particular persons or things, circumstances or conditions, ideas or opinions, which cannot reasonably be explained or justified. It has its likings and dislikings, its whims and caprices, its spites and grudges, its loves, devotions, and affections. In short, as the heart is, so will the man's moral and religious character be; as the heart is, so will the will and actions be, either in harmony or in opposition to the mind and will of God; as the heart is, so will our inclinations and passions be, either for or against the love of God; in fact, as the heart is, so will the whole man be, either for or against God and His Christ. If God is banished from our heart, all evidence as to His being and existence will have little or no effect on us. On the other hand, if God is not in the heart, selfishness will be enthroned, and self-will will be constantly exerted in opposing the holy will of God. If God does not fill the heart with His love, it will with burning eagerness grasp at everything which it can lay hold of, and the inventive imagination will give reality to mere phantoms, mere shadows, and all this in the vain hope of filling up the great void occasioned by unbelief. Yes, our heart has vast capacities,

important and responsible functions, innumerable wants, for it is created to be the abode of the Infinite, and He alone can fill and satisfy it. In itself it cannot find the satisfaction after which it craves and which it needs in order to be happy, contented, and at peace; hence it is in constant search after things which promise to supply all its wants, after perishable things, but as it is not in their nature to satisfy its longings, disappointment will sooner or later follow and be felt in all its bitterness. The natural tendency of the desires, longings and aspirations of our heart should be to rise upwards, heavenwards, to the Infinite, to infinite goodness, love and mercy, but a bad or evil-disposed heart tends downwards to transitory and perishable things. On the direction we allow the tendency of our heart to take, depends its weal or woe, blessedness or misery, and this for time and eternity. Peace, joy, and happiness await the longing heart, if directed to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, our God and our Father, but if otherwise, it must remain disquieted, disturbed and restless, and unsatisfied. It is, alas! true enough, that our heart often wastes all its strength and vigour, in trying to satisfy its wants with the things of this world, but it only meets with disappointment and regret.

The divinities that we have enshrined in our hearts, and to whom, alas! we too often sacrifice our best feelings and affections, prove treacherous and false in the time of need, promising much, but giving little or nothing. A heart from which God and His love are banished, and on whose altar divinities avaricious, lustful, selfish and vain, have taken His place; will be disquieted and disturbed ever and again, for

it is designed to be the temple of Jehovah and not of Baal, for God and His holy love and not for the lusts and passions of man deified. The holy fire of God's love burning on the altar of a believing, devoted, loving heart, is life, light and truth, joy, peace and happiness; but the false fire of idol deities is treacherous, seductive and destructive to man's peace and happiness. Above all things that are worth keeping, "Keep thy heart, for out of it are the issues of life."

II.—We live in a materialistic age, when men do not blush openly to declare that their aim and object is to make the best of this world only. These apostles and confessors of materialism discard all belief in God, redemption, and eternity, pretending to give credit only to the laws of nature, and to be in harmony with them. This visible world, where they came into existence, where their cradle stood, therein they also expect the end of their life in the grave; from existence to nonexistence this is the materialist's dark progress, his dismal hope and prospect. Beyond the grave there is to be no eternity, either of woe or bliss; no responsibility, much less a possible condemnation, for according to this creed, there is no personal holy and just God, no eternity where reward or punishment may be looked for. Matter only is imperishable, and all of man being buried in the grave, is dissolved into atoms, which alone remain. With such a materialistic confession of faith, we need not wonder that its adherents oppose, and this often with vehemence and rage, the positive religion of divine revelation, for there are fanatics among them as intolerant towards those differing from them

as the tribunal of the Spanish inquisition. Away with the priests, away with the churches, away with the book religion, away with the religious instruction in schools, for we need no prescribed religion, no public worship with its attendant ministers ; such is the clamorous demand of these materialistic fanatics. To cry " Away with this or that " is easier said than acted upon, for as long as man's heart remains as it is, the place where God ought to be enthroned, where the consciousness of our dependence upon Him, and the longing desire after Him and His peace is felt, so long will this heart of ours, if true to itself and its best interests, long to be taken possession of by God, rejoice to find peace and happiness in Him, and feel it the greatest privilege and comfort to worship Him in spirit and in truth, in private and in public. The cry, " Away with religion ! " ought rather to be : " Away with our heart, which longs after peace and rest in God." If we refuse to allow the living God with His holy love to occupy the place in our heart which belongs to Him, we shall the more readily give it away to all kinds of idols, which will sooner or later make slaves of us, and effect our ruin. O, how many are the idols which we allow to usurp the place within us which belongs to the one living and true God ! There is the idol of pleasure, which requires sacrifices to be offered, consisting of time, talent, energy, health, and wealth. The well-being of the family, the usefulness of life, the aspirations and longings of the soul, are sacrificed at the shrine of this captivating idol, and all this in the hope of getting rid of the heart's disquietude and the soul's

need. But what is the real experience in this respect? Constant amusement, constant excitement, constant change, and the inward misery remains unremoved. What great sacrifices does not the great idol of man's world, called Mammon, demand of his devotees! How cleverly he succeeds with men in the treacherous phantoms he holds before them, spurring them constantly on to pursue them with all diligence. He promises us great and many things, even the perfect satisfaction of our heart's desire. But all he can offer us is of this world, vain and perishable. The more he gives, the more our appetites are sharpened, until the fire of covetousness is kindled within us, which, if not checked in time, will eventually consume us. On the altar of this divinity, this great Moloch, men and women sacrifice their talents, strength, time, yea, often their honour, reputation, health, and life. What sacrifices does not the passionate and inordinate desire for honour, power, and position require of those whose hearts are inflamed with the glittering prospect of being looked up to by man. They are driven from one step to another forward and forward, until the highest point is reached, which may be the very point of their downfall. Thus this idol of honour, power and glory often proves as treacherous as any other idol of man's devotion. Even the love of those near and dear to us by the ties of blood or friendship, natural and legitimate as it is, can degenerate into idolatry, if God's love has not the first and foremost place in our hearts. Above all things that are worth keeping, "Keep thy heart, for out of it are the issues of life."

III.—There is a false and a true Christianity, and we shall have no difficulty in distinguishing the one from the other. False Christianity understands, by taking care of the heart, the suppression and stifling of all its natural and legitimate aspirations, desires, and wants, whilst true Christianity gives them the right and true direction, stimulating them to fasten their attention upon that which can elevate, purify, and give true and lasting satisfaction. True Christianity, by the renewing power of God's love, revives and strengthens all the nobler powers of the soul, and thus enables them to control all the lower passions and keep them in subjection. False Christianity is stern and ascetic, filling its blind followers with constant fear and anxiety, even begrudging them innocent amusements, mirth, or pleasure. It proposes to itself to exterminate covetousness, to suppress the passions for honour and power, to stifle the natural feelings of love, and to make temptations of any and every kind almost impossible, and to effect such a great and wonderful task a very simple remedy is prescribed. And what think you is this wonder-working remedy? It is nothing else but that we should renounce this world altogether, flee it and shut ourselves up in high-walled houses, called monasteries and convents. We are to bid good-bye to this beautiful world, to family ties, to the duties of an active and useful life with all its demands. There in solitude, it is confidently maintained, will this heart of ours lose its inventive and creative power of shaping and forming for itself false divinities, for there it would be able to enjoy undisturbed sweet and holy com-

munion with its God and Saviour, and be able to serve them with undivided heart and affection. If this were pure and true Christianity, as maintained by some fanatics that it is, we should do well to refuse to accept it, for such a Christianity would be nothing more or less than an institution for the gradual extermination of the human race altogether. Thank God ! we are better informed on this subject. We know that it is not Christianity, not the religion of Christ, which is thus presented to us in such a revolting and unnatural manner, but rather a caricature, a libel on true Christianity. If in withdrawing from the world and retiring into solitude, man could only take with him a renewed, sanctified heart, then we could believe that he individually would be able to realize the object he has set before him ; but possessing such a heart, he need not shun society with its duties and obligations, as he would be quite safe here too. Wherever this old natural heart of ours, with its longings and desires, its lusts and passions, may be, there it will have its temptations and will have to register its sins and transgressions, in solitude as well as in the world. Christ prayed to His Father respecting His true followers, "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." If we have above all things to take care of our heart, with its infinite longings and desires, that it is not deceived and endangered by surrendering itself to false and treacherous objects, it is necessary that a noble, holy, and divine object for its love and affection is in existence and presented to man, and this true Christianity

does, in announcing God's holy and infinite love in Christ Jesus. The love Christ manifested towards man will at all times be effectual in winning man's heart and affection towards Him, towards our Father in heaven. This love will open the hearts of honest and sincere men, and will fill them with divine peace, joy, and happiness, and thus truly and lastingly satisfy all life's true and genuine wants. And if our heart is but taken possession of by this divine, sanctifying love, it will feel no inclination to listen to the captivating persuasion of treacherous suitors and seducers. It will be a holy temple for God's holy love, a heavenly peace and serenity will reign there, the sacred flame of love and devotion to God and His Christ will burn in all its brightness and purity, and we shall have a foretaste of the peace, joy, and happiness that await us in the eternal abode of bliss. And in this temple reared up within our hearts there will be room enough for love and devotion for all that is good, true, and beautiful, for all that is truly ennobling and exalting; room enough for love towards our friends and kindred, towards our neighbours and our nation, towards all men of whatever colour, of whatever nationality and creed they may be. We shall then love God with our whole heart and our neighbour as ourselves.

III.

The Allsufficiency of God's Grace.

2 CORINTHIANS XII. 9.

"And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

I.—When an Apostle speaks to us as one authorized to make known the principles and requirements of Christ's religion, he not only has a right to demand of us a docile disposition, but also that we receive him with the confidence and respect due to his position. Although we may have our liking for this or that particular apostle, yet we feel that we owe to all of them a large debt of gratitude and that all deserve our highest esteem. When, however, an apostle takes us into the secrets of his private life and relates to us his troubles and sufferings, not in any way connected with, nor arising from his office as such, but common to the human race, he cannot fail to awaken in every feeling heart the deepest sympathy. None of the apostles has so much to relate concerning his bodily ailments and sufferings, as the greatest of the apostles, viz., Paul, and consequently none receives so much of the Christian's sympathy as this apostle. He was a man of weak health, of nervous temperament, and as such, naturally irritable. This was aggravated by a meanness of bodily presence. He was certainly not that tall and stately person represented by Raphael in his well-known picture of him preaching at

Athens on the steps of the Areopagus. The German painter Albrecht Durer has more correctly represented him as stooping and weak, and Renan may not be far wrong in asserting that "he was an ugly little Jew." His opponents, who were not few, especially among the Judaizing Christians, reproached him, that "his bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible," and did all they could to lower him in the estimation of others and thus hinder his apostolical work. They not rarely succeeded in this their malicious designs with strangers, but when Paul once got strangers to forget his outward appearance and give him a fair hearing, he invariably succeeded in gaining their confidence and respect. Those who knew him most, loved, honoured, and obeyed him as their friend and teacher, for this acutely sensitive apostle had a heart beating with love, even for those who spoke all manner of evil of him falsely. None of the apostles laboured under such great disadvantage as Paul, but none of them was so gifted, so learned, so enthusiastic, so exulting, and so successful. If his Christ-living and loving soul had had its dwelling in a healthy frame, humanly speaking, a larger amount of work would have been accomplished by him. But this treasure was in an earthen vessel, frail and poor-looking, and being fully conscious of this, he often groaned and longed to be clothed upon with the habitation which is from heaven. His bodily suffering must have been at times most acute, and we know some of the causes, although we shall never with certainty know what "the thorn in the flesh" was, of which he speaks in our text; and as might have been expected,

learned and unlearned persons have taxed their ingenuity to find out what Paul could have meant by using this forcible expression. It would be instructive as well as amusing, were we to bring before you the various opinions advanced on it. We refrain from doing this, but we cannot withhold one opinion which claims to be scientifically correct. The persons entertaining it say, that since Paul speaks of "the thorn in the flesh" in connection with visions he had, he must have experienced its painful effect, when in a visionary state. They say it is a well-known fact that a visionist is suddenly seized with convulsive fits, or spasms, which contract the muscles and fibres; in fact, the whole organism of the body is violently shaken: sleep follows, in which the visions occur. As Paul had often such visions, he must often have experienced such paroxysms, which he felt to be as painful as if some evil disposed being had been buffeting him. This is the opinion of the scientists, but whether correct or not, it is not for us to decide. This much, however, appears to be certain, that Paul suffered some chronic bodily malady, with which were connected paroxysms of a violent nature, as if some mischievous person had struck him heavy blows with the fist. He tells us that he prayed thrice to be freed from this trouble, this thorn in the flesh. Whether this means really *thrice*, or is to be taken, as often in Scripture, for an indefinite number, expositors and divines disagree. We are inclined to believe that the apostle prayed really only *thrice*, on occasions when he suffered such violent attacks, and that it was at the third time that he received the important and salutary answer:

“My grace is sufficient for thee: for My power is made perfect in weakness.”

II. Our text embodies the answer the Apostle Paul received from the Lord on a thrice-repeated fervent prayer, to be entirely freed from what he called “the thorn in the flesh.” And we have every reason to believe that this answer was given to him when he had sent up his petition for the third time, not in immediate succession, but at intervals. The answer he received was not exactly the one he had asked for. He implored to have “the thorn in the flesh” entirely removed; but instead of having this his petition granted, he was told: “My grace is sufficient for thee.” To many superficial people such an answer would be considered an insult as well as a mockery. They would argue, with a show of reason, that when a man asks the Lord to be delivered from a specific trouble mentioned by him, which it is in His power to remove, He is expected either to grant this request or refuse to do so; but to be told that he has to bear it, this betrays either indifference or cruelty on the part of the refuser. If the man thus arguing is a shallow Christian he will maintain stubbornly that God stands engaged to hear and answer prayer. And, besides quoting many passages of Holy Writ to this effect, he would quote Christ’s promise expressed in the words: “If ye abide in me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you.” He will dwell with emphasis on the latter clause of the promise, which encourages prayer of every kind, and holds out the prospect of having it answered always in the petitioner’s sense and meaning. We believe,

he would, however, be of a totally different opinion were he to give all due attention to finding out the real meaning of the first part of Christ's promise, which restricts the latter part within a certain limit. We say, that let a man be really a Christian, having the mind and disposition of Christ, he would, like Him, indeed pray in great trial: "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me," but he would also, like Him, in deep humility add: "Not my will, but Thy will be done."

Now the Apostle Paul had the spirit and disposition of Christ. Christ and His Word did abide in him. Hence he asked in prayer, even thrice, that the Lord would deliver him from this troublesome "thorn in the flesh." Now though the answer was entirely different from what he asked and probably expected, he nevertheless fully submitted to it, and this even cheerfully. Had he not been a true Christian, a real disciple of Christ, how mortifying would such an answer have been to him! To be told that a sore trouble is never to depart from him, though he so fervently prayed that it might, and to be told *that* by Him who had it in His power to grant this wish of his were He only willing to do so, this would have been to little minds more than they could stand, and sufficient to induce them to lose faith altogether in such a God. These little minds would, in their selfishness, require of God to change the course of nature, the laws which govern the universe and each individual being, to meet their requirements, to gratify their selfish desires. They consider their little personality to be of as much value as the whole of mankind, and their narrow sphere as

large as the universe; hence an especial interference on the part of the Divinity is absolutely necessary whenever *they* feel the need of the same. Now Paul had a large, comprehensive, and penetrating mind, which preserved him from such childish folly and conceit. He indeed prayed, and that even thrice, that "the thorn in the flesh" might depart from him, and thus fully believed in God's almighty power; but he knew that this almighty being is also all-wise, and respects the laws He has given. He further was convinced that this almighty and all-wise God is also his Father, who would not allow him to suffer unnecessarily, but make it conducive to the well-being of his higher spiritual life. He not only had reasonable and correct thoughts and opinions respecting his Father in heaven, but he also had such respecting himself. He was not at all ashamed to acknowledge his weaknesses and failings. Little minds would carefully hide them and endeavour to magnify all the virtues they may possess; but not so Paul, the great apostle; whatever faults or failings his enemies may have reproached him with, he himself had a thorough knowledge of them. He felt that he had an inclination to pride and vain-glory, something of the pharisaical leaven, still left in him, and if this "thorn in the flesh" would keep this spiritual pride down and make him more humble and submissive, he most gladly would glory in his weakness, meaning this very "thorn in the flesh." This "thorn in the flesh" was his weakness, but the grace of Christ the Lord became his strength, for the answer to his prayer was: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My power is made perfect in weakness."

III. Whether there is more misery than happiness, more suffering than joy, more evil than good, in the world, is a fit subject of interest to the philosopher. And there are two schools of philosophy which take either the one or the other view of life. The optimist dwells with complacency on the bright side, and the pessimist on the dark side of human life. As believing Christians we cannot but be optimists, although we may agree in the main with the pessimist in what he brings forward in justification of his system. We are, however, optimists on totally different grounds from those the philosophical optimist occupies. We do not take a one-sided view of life at all, as he and the pessimist do. We take human life in its reality and totality, with its joys *and* sufferings, its happiness *and* misery, its evil *and* good, its loss *and* gain, because in the love of God in Christ Jesus we have that divine element in us which turns the suffering *into* joy, the misery *into* happiness, the evil *into* good, the loss *into* gain, for "all things," we are assured, "work together for good, to those who love God." Hence, as believing Christians, we cannot but be optimists. We are, as Christians, by no means exempt from the trials and sorrows of life common to mankind, and we have as much as any non-Christian our "thorns in the flesh," which buffet us more or less violently, but we have something which is specifically Christian, and this something is nothing less than the grace of God, the love wherewith He has loved us in Christ Jesus. This grace is quite sufficient in power to enable us to bear all the ills of life with Christian patience and humble resignation to the will

of our Father in heaven, from whom everything proceeds, and to whom everything leads, if we will but by faith allow ourselves to be led and influenced by His grace. "My grace is sufficient for thee," was said to the greatest apostle in answer to his prayer to get rid of some especial affliction sorely distressing him. Although the trouble complained of remained unchanged and unremoved most probably throughout his eventful life, yet the divine strength vouchsafed to him was sufficiently powerful to enable him not only to bear it without murmuring, but even to rejoice under it. Yea, he had the express promise that God's power would in such a measure be imparted to him as to meet the requirements of his especial case, for "My power," saith the Lord, "is made perfect in weakness." Now God's promise has been verified in the life of the apostle, as you can read it in all his epistles. In spite of his "thorn in the flesh" remaining unremoved, God's grace proved sufficient for him, and strength was imparted to him, so that he could say : "When I am weak, then am I strong." The apostle as a child of God was fully conscious of being a citizen of a better country, for which he had to be prepared and qualified in this world of probation. He was fully aware that he was being educated by his heavenly Father with the object of one day entering into the eternal inheritance prepared for him, and that in all his trials and sufferings he was really undergoing a training for his future glorious position. Even "the thorn in the flesh" was by God's grace one means of hindering him from yielding to self-conceit and spiritual

pride to which his natural disposition and inclination tended. Now, as in the case of this hero of faith, so it will be with all Christ's faithful. They may, like him, have a "thorn in the flesh," which sorely tries their faith and patience, and may hinder their usefulness in life. Now, if they pray like him to be freed from it, they may perhaps receive the same answer he received of the Lord: "My grace is sufficient for thee." Put in the language of philosophy the answer would be: "What cannot be cured, must be endured." Now in this every reasonable infidel would agree, for he tries stoically to bear his troubles, with what success we will not stay to argue. We have here to do with the believing Christian's "crook in his lot," with his especial trials which wring from the heart and soul the fervent prayer that they may depart from him. When he receives the same answer as Paul did of the Lord, he may indeed like him feel that the pain and suffering has not in any degree diminished, but he will, like him, most assuredly feel that divine strength has been imparted to him to enable him to bear it patiently and submissively, and even gladly; like the apostle, he will glory in his weakness that "the strength of Christ may rest upon him." The greater the trial and suffering, the larger the amount of divine power and strength that is promised to be given to Christ's afflicted people, for as He said to His tried apostle, He also says to all His afflicted and tried disciples in all ages. We have not to do with a capricious divinity, nor with an inexorable tyrant, but with a God who hears and answers prayer, with a loving and compassionate

Father, who is desirous of educating us for an eternity of bliss. From each visitation He is anxious that we should derive some especial benefit. Now it is for us to find out what it is, that we may be able to co-operate with Him in realizing it. This was the wise method the Apostle Paul adopted, and it should recommend itself to every sincere believer in Christ. At all events the trials of life should bring us nearer to God, who is our sufficiency and strength, and if they accomplished this, then they will be an incalculable blessing to us. It has been the experience of Christ's faithful ones in all ages, that they "are made perfect through suffering," whilst in health and prosperity they are constantly in danger of drifting away from the Rock of Ages. Now I cannot imagine a grander and nobler spectacle, a more saintly sight, than a suffering Christian, though smarting under affliction, though passing through the waters of tribulation, realizing God's grace to be his sufficiency, and feeling God's strength sustaining him in his weakness, full of joy and comfort, full of peace and hope, and singing hymns of praise to the God of all comfort and consolation. God's grace is sufficient for every position and condition in a believing Christian's life, and His power is made perfect in the Christian's weakness, so as to make of him a hero of faith, gaining at last the imperishable crown of glory.

IV.

The Christian's Influence in the World.

MATT. v. 13.

"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."

I.—Our text forms a small but important part of the long address Christ delivered on the Mount in Galilee to a large concourse of people. In this, His address, usually called "the Sermon on the Mount," He stated and explained the moral and religious principles on which His kingdom was to be established, maintained, and advanced. He plainly told these assembled people for what purpose He was anxious to enlist them as citizens of His kingdom, and what mission they would have to fulfil towards others, were they to become His loyal and obedient subjects. In fact, He told them in plain words that, in a certain sense, they were to be to others what He would be to them. His kingdom would only flourish and extend, He told them, when His subjects, true to Him and His mission, would exercise, in their respective spheres of life, to the best of their knowledge and ability, such an influence for good as their close and intimate union with Him as their King and Master would enable them to do. Christ was fully conscious that His work here on earth could only be successfully carried out through human agency, and in so far as these agents were under His direct influence, teaching and guidance. His

faithful ones' calling and position in life was to bear witness to the world of the renewing power of His divine love by word and actions, and thus be instrumental in spreading His divine light and truth. They were to be "the salt of the earth," "the light of the world." Never was entrusted to man a higher and nobler work to do for his fellow man, than Christ entrusted to His disciples, and to all who sincerely and faithfully attach themselves to Him. The Sermon on the Mount, in which He made known these principles of His religion, was addressed to a mixed audience, including those that afterwards were His apostles. They were Galilean peasants and fishermen, publicans and sinners, rough and ignorant people, mostly narrow-minded and bigoted, whom perhaps mere curiosity to hear what the new teacher had to say, or to witness His miraculous acts, had brought together at Mount Kur Hattin. Now to tell such a motley assembly that each one of them was "the salt of the earth," "the light of the world," was it not exaggeration? Was it not flattery? Was it not irony on the part of the Great Teacher? We know that no such impure motives ever polluted the holy teacher's hallowed mind. Every word Christ uttered on the Mount was meant to be taken in the sense in which an unsophisticated mind reads and understands it. The subjects treated of in this discourse are of so serious and important a nature as of necessity to exclude every doubtful motive. Christ has, at all times and on all occasions, said what He meant and meant what He said. He never shrunk back from telling the whole truth to every one He came into contact with, for He knew that nothing

but the truth could save man and make him truly free. And He was convinced that in that assembly there were some at least who would make good His words and be "the salt of the earth." It was incumbent on every man listening to Him, be he ignorant or degraded, to be "the salt of the earth," an influence for good to others, but He knew too much of man to indulge the hope of seeing it realized in every one that heard the statement uttered. Whether many or few would be willing to become faithful citizens of His kingdom, and, united to Him, be "the salt of the earth," time would reveal. He on His part was anxious that all of them should thus realize their high calling and be a blessing in their day and generation. Whether few or many responded to His call is difficult now to ascertain, but we know it to be a well-established fact, that His immediate followers did become a salt to the world, influencing individuals and nations for good. Christianity through its indwelling divine power and through the beneficent influence exerted by all its devoted adherents, was the salt that saved the old civilized world from entire putrefaction, and infused into it a new life, full of health and vigour. Now this salt has not lost its seasoning power and virtue even in our own time. Much as there may be in Christian countries and among Christian nations that gives us just cause for complaint and regret, yet these countries and nations are distinguished from those who have never experienced the power and efficacy of Christ's religion in any measure or degree whatever by their higher standard of morality, by their advancement in knowledge, science, literature and art, by their vigor

ous social and political life, by their enormous industry and commerce, by their charitable institutions and associations, and by all that characterizes our modern progress and civilization. "Ye are the salt of the earth," was said by Christ respecting His people.

II.—The first disciples of Christ influenced the world for good by preaching and propagating the gospel of Christ, and this not only by word of mouth, but also by writing. The truth as it is in Christ, which had been received by them in faith, and the power and efficacy of which they experienced in their own heart and soul, this it was they were zealous to promote among others. The firm conviction of the truth they possessed, and the fervent zeal and holy enthusiasm they displayed in propagating it, could not fail often to make a deep and salutary impression on those whom they were anxious to see benefited by it. Even where the message they had to deliver was considered unreasonable or incredible, the conviction was often forced upon the objectors, that whatever they may think of the story of the cross as such, certainly these men were convinced of its truth and were ready even to stake their lives for it. This, their sincere conviction of the gospel truth, even where it failed to produce the desired effect, was nevertheless, not altogether without some influence for good upon those with whom they came in contact. Conviction of the truth we profess to believe, will never be without some good effect upon those who have it not. Now, these early disciples not only believed and propagated the gospel of Christ, but they left also writings behind them, wherein they stated

the reason of the hope that was in them. Thus, though being dead, they yet speak, having spoken already to myriads of human beings during] a period of almost two thousand years, and will continue to do so unto the end of time. Their influence, then, has been for good already to countless numbers of souls, and is as powerful and effective now as it ever has been, and ever will be. They were, in reality and truth, the salt of the earth whilst living, and will continue to be such throughout all generations. These two ways used by Christ's apostles and early disciples will ever prove more or less successful in spiritually influencing and benefiting nations and individuals. The gospel preached by earnest and devoted servants of Christ can never fail to produce the desired effect. It indeed seems that in our day the pulpit does not exercise such a power and influence as we might reasonably expect. It is sad to see how few, comparatively speaking, do attend regularly a place of worship. In many of the large cities and towns in Christendom the percentage of church-going people is so low as to startle us. We ask ourselves, what can be the cause of this surprising and humiliating phenomenon? Has the gospel of Christ lost its inherent divine power and efficacy? Has the salt of the earth lost its savour? We are convinced that the gospel of Christ meets all man's spiritual wants, and that no man can, without great injury and immense loss to himself, dispense with it. We firmly believe that Christ's gospel is not only the saving of the individual man, but most certainly also that of nations and peoples. The rise and fall of nations, as well as individuals,

depends upon the position and disposition they take towards Christ, either for or against. This history has confirmed, and the fact is being confirmed even in our own days. Take a map and mark those nations who bear the Christian name and those that do not, and then compare their political and social conditions with one another, and we are sure and certain that the conclusion to which you will come will confirm the opinion we have advanced. You will even be able to find out whether those nations still bearing the name of Christ have little or much of the salt of His gospel in them, by comparing them with each other. But besides this, we are convinced that, if the gospel of Christ were to be presented to the men of our time in all its purity and in a modern form intelligible and attractive, it would speak with force of conviction and draw the masses of our people to Him. New wine, Christ tells us, must be put into new bottles ; but alas ! this salutary advice has not yet been acted upon by our Protestant Churches. The wine is, to a large extent, still kept in the bottles procured for it at the time of the Reformation, and not a few have even discarded these for much older ones, called Romish. What a mighty influence for good the thousands of pulpits in Christendom would have, were Christ preached in every pulpit faithfully and in such a manner as really to reach the hearts and consciences of the hearers ! We want earnestness, faithfulness, wisdom and charity, in those who stand engaged to preach Christ to sinful, struggling and dying men. We live in an age, when, for evil or good, men bestir themselves and move in a more rapid manner than ever before. If the Christian

is anxious to counteract the evil and pernicious tendencies of our age and influence the masses for the good and well-being of their souls, he must also bestir himself and extend the sphere of his operation and usefulness, to do all that is calculated to advance man and society, and is of use and interest to both. If nations, as well as individuals, cannot live a life worthy of the name, a life reflecting honour and praise to the Creator and our Father in heaven, without the renewing and sustaining grace of Christ's gospel, then let this preserving and invigorating divine element be put into all man's undertakings and doings, that they may thus be rightly and usefully influenced. The Christian ought to extend his usefulness and influence to the press and literature, to science and art, to politics, industry and commerce, in fact, to all that can raise and benefit society and individuals. "Ye," believing Christians, "are the salt of the earth," says Christ, and all men's daily, intellectual, moral, and spiritual food, ought to be seasoned with the gospel truth, that it might be nutritious and wholesome.

III.—The first disciples and early Christians influenced the world for good not only by preaching and teaching the principles of Christ's religion, and by setting them forth in writing, but they lived in harmony with them a consistent Christian life. The world was astonished and perplexed to see men of different nationalities and positions in life united in brotherly love to each other, bearing one another's burdens, and competing with each other in doing good, and this not only to those of the same household of faith, but even to those who persecuted and hated them. Their

lives were the best and most effectual exponent of the creed they professed, and often produced a far better and more enduring effect upon the unbelieving heathen than the most eloquent and impressive statement of the tenets of their new religion could have done. The Christian virtues and graces that adorned their life and actions testified of the renewing power of Christ's love, and induced honest and truth-loving men to inquire after the mysterious source of so much love and forbearance, so much self-denial and self-sacrifice, so much joy and happiness, as they witnessed among these despised Nazarenes. Probably a great many of these faithful disciples of Christ were poor and needy as to their worldly possessions, and not a few were even in servitude as slaves, but their Christian life and conduct drew the attention of the great and mighty of this world to them. In fact, the life of each one of them was "an epistle of Christ, known and read of all men." And as then, so ever since; the true and genuine Christian endeavours by a consistent, godly life to reflect the spirit of his divine Master, and thus be "an epistle of Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God." These epistles will be known and read of all, and cannot fail to produce more or less a salutary effect upon the readers. The silent and unconscious influence the Christian believer exercises by his life on strangers to his faith and hope, has ever proved more effectual than anything else in bringing the observer to the cross of Christ as a true penitent. On the other hand, inconsistencies, whether little or great, in the life and conduct of those professing to

be Christians, have had at all times a pernicious effect and have retarded the progress of Christ's kingdom. Inconsistency in professing Christians is, however, a sure and unmistakable proof of the impure quality of the salt or the doubtful character of the faith that is in them. And Christ had certainly such salt of an impure quality in mind as is now in Palestine, which, when deposited in damp places or exposed to the sun and atmosphere, loses its inherent seasoning power, and is of no use except to be thrown into the streets and trodden upon. Our pure salt never loses its inherent virtue, and hence answers all our reasonable and legitimate expectations. In employing this striking metaphor Christ gives us to understand that if our faith in Him is allowed to be mixed up with selfishness or other kinds of impurity, it will not be able to withstand long the worldly influences to which it is exposed. The little strength it may possess will surely evaporate and vanish, if not purified from earthliness and permitted to increase in strength daily. "If the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" If the Christian loses his faith in Christ, he loses the very thing which alone enables him to be a Christian, and imparts the power of exercising a holy influence on others. If the Christian loses his faith in Christ, he is "good for nothing" in Christ's kingdom, which he is not able to defend, much less to extend. He is thenceforth "good for nothing" but to be cast out, and he is cast out of Christ's kingdom, and this, alas! by his own unbelief. "Ye are the salt of the earth" can only be meant of Christians whose faith is genuine and true, firm

and abiding, increasing and purified, and, if so, they will realize Christ's expectations, help to Christianize the world, and thus be an incalculable blessing to many. O, how many there are who still bear the name of Christ, still have the appearance of being the salt of the earth, but who, in reality, have lost all their strength and virtue, and are without any influence for good, in the Christian sense, to others. History can teach them, if they are inclined to learn the salutary lesson, that if nations lose their faith in Christ they lose with it all that preserves and ennobles them, and can enable them to advance in a true and healthy civilization. The cradle of Christianity stood in Asia, and there were at one time many flourishing churches, but with the vanishing of their Christian faith these nations have become degraded, and are still such in more or less degree. And how many individuals are daily ruined by losing their faith, we see and know enough, but eternity will make more startling revelations in this respect. O ! what an inestimable privilege and honour is conferred upon us, that we, however poor and needy we may be in the world's estimation, should be deemed worthy to be co-workers with Christ, spreading His light and truth among our fellow-men and thus becoming an incalculable blessing to them ! The success of Christ's kingdom here on earth depends then in a large measure upon the Christian's direct or indirect influence upon others, upon the nature and quality of his faith in Christ, and especially upon the sanctity of his life. Ye, believing Christians, are the salt of the earth—may it never lose its savour !

V.

Prayer.

MATTHEW xv. 22-25.

"And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away, for she crieth after us. But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me."

I.—To escape for a time the annoyance and animosity of the Pharisaical party, Christ had left the sea of Galilee, and turned His steps in a north-westerly direction, along the coast of Tyre and Sidon, passing through the upper Galilean mountains into the border-land of Phœnicia. Here in a heathen land He was seeking rest and quietude for a while, but alas! human woe and misery sought Him out also in this retreat, and denied Him that rest He sought. The news of His arrival soon spread, and, almost immediately, a Syro-Phœnician woman, a Canaanite by birth, made her appearance. Overwhelmed with grief at the illness of her daughter, she had come to Christ, whose fame as a miracle-worker had reached her country, and urgently besought Him to heal her. With sorrowful heart she cried aloud: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." Can grief and pain find expression in more soul-piercing words than those employed by that afflicted woman? And can any feeling heart remain untouched by them? And yet we are told that the tender-hearted Saviour, who came into the

world to bind up the broken-hearted, to give beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness—it was who seemed at first to have been altogether unmindful of the poor woman's petition. We ask in astonishment, What may have been the cause of this—His singular behaviour? Was it perhaps that this woman belonged to the accursed race of the Canaanites? We are certain that the Saviour of the human race was entirely free from such narrow-mindedness and national prejudice. Besides this, the woes and miseries of mankind appeal with force to human sympathy, and ought to find a hearty response in the breast of every true man, irrespective of the sufferer's creed or nationality. And we are convinced that the heathen woman's woe did touch the tender heart of Him who bore our sorrows, and yet Christ's demeanour appears to us strange, knowing His usual readiness to give relief to any and every sufferer applying to Him. His disciples that accompanied Him seemed on this occasion to manifest more humane feelings towards the troubled woman than their Lord and Master, for they begged Him to satisfy the woman's request, for from the reply Christ gave them we are justified in this assumption. They wanted Him to grant her wish as soon as possible, since her pitiful cries became rather troublesome and were painful to bear. What an apparent sympathy these interceding disciples manifested, and what an apparent coldness or indifference on the part of Him to whom the petition for help was directed! The sequel of the narrative gives us, however, a totally different idea.

respecting the motives by which both were actuated towards the woman, and it is the motive that decides as to the merit of an action. If we consider the apparent sympathy of the disciples towards the woman we shall have no difficulty in finding out that it was no real sympathy at all that they felt. They besought Christ in the words: "Send her away; for she crieth after us." Is it not plain enough to see that they thought only of self-ease, which they were loath to have thus interfered with? And when they besought Christ to satisfy the claims of this woman they thought by so doing they would get rid of their annoyance. Send her away, and we shall then have rest and can enjoy without interruption our intercourse about heavenly things, must have been the secret motive which induced them to intercede on the woman's behalf. And in this their request there is as little of real sympathy for the troubled woman as we may have when accosted in the street by a beggar whose demand on our charity we feel no inclination to satisfy. The beggar, however, has learned, in his unenviable occupation, experience, and knows human weakness well enough not to feel disappointed at our first refusal. He is not so easily got rid of, and runs after us with a pitiful voice repeating his first request, and the result mostly is that he receives some alms. Can this giving be called charity? Certainly not! Neither was the intercession of the disciples for the woman made out of sympathy for her. In answer to their request, the Saviour gave a refusal couched in the words: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This answer does not contradict His

statement made on another occasion, where He speaks of other sheep He hath that do not belong to this fold, (Gentile) but which He must bring together : and they shall hear His voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. His personal activity was indeed among the Jews, but He was ever mindful that He was the Saviour of the whole human race. "And I," He said, "when I am lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." When the curtain of the temple was rent in twain, the partition wall that separated Jew from Gentile, man from man, was broken down, the cross was raised up instead of it, the ensign and symbol of fraternal love and unison between Jew and Gentile, united in one flock, under the one Good Shepherd. Whilst Christ said that His mission was to the Jews, He at the same time taught His disciples by showing mercy to the heathen woman, belonging to an accursed race, that God, His Father, is "no respecter of persons : but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." The poor Syro-Phœnician woman manifested such strong faith in Christ as was rarely found among the favoured Jewish nation, and consequently belongs to the Israel of God. In faith and humility she persevered in her heartfelt, fervent prayer to Him, who alone could grant her petition. From every trial her faith came out more purified and strengthened, and at last her prayer was answered in mercy shown to her. The trial of her faith was much more precious than of gold that perisheth, and to see her possessed of such an incalculable blessing was Christ's intention from the very beginning.

II.—There can be no religion without prayer, for if religion is as it ought to be, a conscious life in fellowship and communion with our Father in heaven, prayer is the language employed in our intercourse with Him, whereby we give expression to our hidden spiritual life. Like our instinctive belief in God, the sense of responsibility and the aspirations of the soul after immortality, we have also an instinctive prompting to pray, and an instinctive belief in the efficacy of prayer. The feeling of dependence, the sense of weakness, the consciousness of sin and guilt, the pressure of misery, the longing aspiration after moral purity, in fact all that fills and occupies our soul finds its natural and adequate expression in prayer. In the hour of trial and perplexity, the cry for divine help will rise from the lips of even sceptical men, for nature is stronger than all our logic or science. We cannot let a day pass without great disadvantage and loss to ourselves, if we are not conscious of our communion with God and keep up our filial intercourse with Him. We need daily new strength to carry on our warfare with our foes within and without; we cannot bear the burden of life with dignity and composure, and we cannot with courage and hope face all the ills of life without flying for refuge to God, our Almighty Father. We are constantly surrounded and assailed by temptations which find traitors within us in our sinful inclinations, and should we rise victorious over them, we must appeal for strength and assistance to our holy Father in heaven. In all positions, conditions, and circumstances of life, in spite of our artificial self-composure, there will come moments of

fear and disquietude, of sorrow and perplexity, of suffering and sadness, and the longing desire after something that is unchangeable and abiding in this transitory world will prompt us to betake ourselves in supplication to Him who is unchangeable and abiding, the Eternal, who is our merciful and loving Father, ready and willing to help. If we direct our attention more closely to ourselves we shall not fail to discover within us much that will induce us to go to our Father, and crave mercy of Him. If we take life in earnest, as it in reality is, we cannot reasonably neglect such a divine source of joy and comfort, of strength and peace, which prayer to our merciful Father opens to us. In riches we are threatened with avarice and covetousness, and in poverty we are exposed to the danger of being envious and dissatisfied ; in good days we may be overbearing, and in evil days we may be cast down and even desponding ; health may nourish and incite our sinful passions, and sickness may make us morose and refractory ; the bustle of life diverts us and the solitude troubles and disquiets us ; science puffeth up and ignorance again misleads us ; worldly pleasures are deceptive, and religious abstinence may make us proud and narrow-minded. Wherever we turn, and in all conditions of life, we are exposed to dangers and temptations, which we may indeed recognise as such, but not always be able in our own strength to remove and overcome, and if we are not to let the reins drop from our hands, we shall be induced to pray to our God and Father for strength and help, wisdom and guidance. We repeat it again, prayer is natural to man,

and, because it is such, we cannot without great loss and disadvantage deprive ourselves of so great, necessary, useful, and God-appointed means to the attainment of our manifold and various wants. Life without prayer would be intolerable. Men of science may decry prayer as being unnecessary, useless, and superstitious, as much as they like, and bring forward the plea that "the order of nature is absolutely persistent and changeless, and that it has never been and never can be interfered with by an act of intelligent volition." This sounds very plausible and even reasonable, but certainly it is only partially and hypothetically true. Nature has been interfered with in times past, and is not altogether so changeless as is maintained by some scientists. And besides this, who says that in prayer we are to ask God to violate His own laws, or interfere destructively with the course of nature? And who will dare to deny the power to the Creator to make His own laws subservient to His allwise will and purpose, when man, His creature, is constantly doing it without stopping or hindering the course of nature? Has then the Creator surrendered His power and abdicated His right to make His own laws subservient to His will, to puny man, His creature? He has created us with this spiritual instinct of offering up to Him prayer, and certainly with the intention in some way or other of satisfying it, for our God is not a capricious and malicious divinity. We must, however, bear in mind that there is only one class of blessings for which he has given any warrant to pray unconditionally, and these are spiritual blessings. For strength to resist temptation, to endure

affliction, and perform well our appointed work in life ; for grace to purify our nature, elevate our aims, conquer our selfishness and pride, and help us to form a noble character, God has authorised and commanded us to pray. But for the blessings of this life, for deliverance from danger and suffering, for restoration from sickness, and for long life, we are taught to pray in submission to that highest wisdom which knows what is best for us, and to append to every supplication, however ardent our desire and intense our solicitude ; “ Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt ! ” *

III.—Prayer is, to the believing Christian, something more than a natural instinct, something more than mere duty and obligation, which can and is often violated and neglected, often complied with only in the soul’s anguish and bewilderment. Prayer is the Christian’s habitual interchange of thoughts and feelings with his heavenly Father, the key which unlocks to him his Father’s treasures, and the mightiest weapon in the whole armoury of God. It is the redeemed and renewed Christian’s greatest joy and comfort to take his flight upwards on the wings of faith to his loving Father, there to quench his thirst out of the fountain of life, there to draw strength in his weakness, there to seek help in the time of need, comfort in suffering, light and guidance in the hour of perplexity, and there to find peace and security in moments of danger. The believing Christian is encouraged to draw nigh at all times to the mercy-seat of his God in prayer, for He has drawn

* Cocker’s “ Theistic Conception of the World,” New York, 18 p. 318.

nigh unto him through Christ the Saviour. In the consciousness that we are by faith in Christ His own redeemed children, our souls breathe free, our hearts are filled with joy and hope, and we cannot do otherwise than in our habitual intercourse with Him express to Him all our thoughts and feelings, our hopes and fears. We have such a childlike confidence in Him, that we are thoroughly convinced that "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, will, with Him, freely give us all things." Having freely given us the most precious gift He had to bestow, He will surely not withhold from us all those things we really stand in need of. Christ then is to the believing Christian the sure and certain pledge of God's infinite love and compassion to him, and the guarantee that if we will fulfil His will in all things we shall receive all things we truly need for time and eternity. We are, as true Christians, convinced that God is in very deed our Father, and that He will on no account suffer His obedient and loving children's wants to be unsupplied, as little as any earthly father will designedly refuse to supply his children's real wants. Hence Christ asks: "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" Our heavenly Father has always thoughts of love and mercy to us, and this also when in His infinite wisdom He sees it right to refuse us many things we ask of Him, for He is

ever desirous to educate His redeemed children for an eternity of bliss. Hence we are expressly told to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things," those we really need, "shall be added unto us." We of little faith seek often first after earthly things, trouble ourselves mostly about things transitory, and then we are surprised when our prayers are not answered to our wishes and likings. We are also often labouring under the delusion that prayer principally consists in asking God to give us this or that thing, whilst, as believing Christians, we ought to know that the first requirement of a true prayer is that we bring a sacrifice out of a grateful heart, the sacrifice of our selfish will and desire. Knowing that in our prayers is often mingled selfishness, we have often to pray to God: "Lord, teach us how to pray!" Teach us to know our real wants and what will be conducive to our eternal well-being. True Christian faith in God's love will battle continually against a selfish will, and enable us to draw nigh to God with child-like confidence, and whilst stating its need in deep humility to Him will be willing to receive every and any answer coming from Him. We have, as believing Christians, to pray in the name of Christ, and if this means anything it can only mean that in His spirit our prayers are to be made. How fervently Christ prayed in Gethsemane to His Father: "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me"; but He also added—"nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt!" Was, then, this His fervent prayer not heard at all? It was, but not in taking away the bitter cup, for this was impossible. The

hearing consisted in this that an angel was sent to minister unto Him, so that strength was imparted to Him to drink the cup. Three times St. Paul earnestly besought the Lord to deliver him from the thorn in the flesh. His request was not granted, but the answer given was: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And if we, as believing Christians, pray as we are required to do in the name of Christ, *i.e.*, in His spirit, we may often also have to drink the bitter cup of suffering, to endure the thorn in our flesh; but grace will be given us to be able to do so without murmuring. The stronger our faith in God's love and mercy, the more ready and willing we shall be to obey His will with child-like humility and confidence, and the less we shall have cause to complain of our prayer having been ineffectual. Before we give way to such an un-Christian complaint we will do well to pray earnestly: "Lord, increase our faith!" How humiliating must be the example of the Syro-Phœnician woman to many professing Christians. Her faith was great and came out of every trial purified and strengthened. Her prayer was fervent and persistent, borne and sustained by faith in the Saviour's power and will to relieve, and expressed in deep humility. Because she believed she received. We, too, shall receive, if we have but faith, strong faith in God's love and sympathy for and with us. "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray," says Christ, "believe that ye receive them, and ye shall obtain them."

VI.

Stephen, the first Christian Martyr.

ACTS VII. 59, 60.

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

I.—The first Christian martyr commands not only the believer's particular attention, but will always awaken within him feelings of sympathy, love, and reverence. To be the first in the long list of Christian warriors, who have, in the conflict with the powers of this world, lost their noble and self-denying lives, is an honour angels might covet. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, taught the believing Christians of all generations the great and important lesson, that in the service of Christ a devoted servant of His will deems it the greatest honour and privilege to sacrifice even his life, if needs be, in his Master's cause. And this, his heroic example, has not been lost on Christ's faithful adherents in all ages. Hosts of such faithful ones have manifested the same Christian heroism in the face of the enemies of the gospel, and although they too often have had to meet with a cruel and untimely death, yet the cause for which they so valiantly fought and shed their life-blood triumphed in spite of apparent defeat, "for the blood of the martyr was the seed of the Church." There never was a braver and nobler band of men and women, of whom the world was not worthy, but to whom the world nevertheless owes a

large debt of gratitude for the great amount of good left as a precious legacy, than those who were, in the inscrutable counsel of an all-wise Providence, called upon to lay down their valuable and useful lives in their earnest endeavours spiritually to benefit individuals and nations. If the world was slow to understand the high and noble aim and object they pursued, unable to discern their pure and disinterested motives, incapable of judging them according to their real merits, this neither surprised nor discouraged them. They were fully convinced that they had the sympathy and approval of their divine King, the glorious conqueror over sin and death, and rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for His sake. They were likewise fully convinced that they had the earnest prayers and heartfelt sympathy of their believing brethren. If the world hated them it was their consolation to know that there were many loving hearts who had them enclosed like precious jewels in a casket, and if the world despised them these loving souls held them in high estimation. Nothing was held in greater esteem in the old Church than martyrdom, and no names were more honoured than those who had sealed their faith and faithfulness to Christ with their own blood. They were considered tried and valiant soldiers of the cross, heroes of faith, who had set a noble example to the numerous combatants fighting for the same glorious cause under the same flag, and for the same King. During the first three centuries of the rise and spread of Christianity, when its professors were placed under exceptional laws, had their property confiscated, were driven

into exile, thrown to wild beasts for the amusement of a blood-thirsty multitude, or sent to the scaffold, the example of those who faced death inspired the believing Christian with courage and enthusiasm. To be a Christian during these fierce persecutions was in reality to be a soldier on the battle-field, ever fighting, but ever in danger of being either wounded or killed. Can we wonder that those fighting in the same rank and file, exposed daily to the same dangers and deprivations, should have honoured and revered the names of their brave comrades, their beloved brethren in the Lord, who had fallen in the battle? Can we wonder that their graves were held sacred as if they were consecrated temples? Can we even wonder at the superstitious reverence shown to the relics of their martyred brothers, and at the saint-worship practised, and alas ! still practised by a Church boasting of unbroken apostolical succession? We can hardly wonder at this, however much we may deplore or condemn it. We are convinced that these holy martyrs would have been horror-struck had they known that the life they were sacrificing in the cause of Christ was to give birth to a new kind of heathenism, and thus hinder the growth of the very kingdom for which they shed their blood. There is no doubt that they would have refused to shed their blood, had they been aware that it would become the seed of saint-worship. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, has shown us by his noble example, that in the spiritual kingdom Christ has established there are interests of such great importance and value to be defended, that faithful and loyal subjects would

even risk their lives in their defence. And through successive ages they have thus been nobly and heroically defended and preserved. It has been said by Renan that with the martyrs commenced the era of intolerance. It can be said, he remarks, with much probability, that he who gives his life for his faith will be intolerant if in power. And in justification of this assertion he refers us to the fact that, when Christianity came out of its first three centuries of persecutions victorious, and became the recognized religion of the land, it was more persecuting than any other religion ever was. If blood has been shed for a cause, he maintains, there is a strong inducement to shed the blood of others, in order to preserve the treasure defended at so great a cost. None can deny the sad fact of which Renan speaks, but certainly Christianity cannot be made answerable, as he wrongly asserts, for the intolerance and cruelty practised in its name against so-called heretics, or men differing from the religious tenets held by a dominant party. The martyrs and confessors suffered on account of their religious conviction, which they would not be forced to abjure, and we cannot see any valid reason for assigning to their faithfulness to Christ the commencement of the era of intolerance. They were mindful of the injunction given to them by their Saviour, in the words: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the Crown of Life."

II.—Stephen was "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit," and because he was such he was "of honest report." He was known and honoured as a true and

humble follower of Christ among those competent to judge such matters. It is true that even the wisest and best of men may be misled, even by honest report, respecting the real character of a man in the odour of sanctity. Men may dissemble or be self-deceived, loud in their Christian profession, frequently seen in the assemblies of the saints, busy themselves in all Christian works, and thus earn the favour of others and be well-spoken of. When a vacancy for a Christian office occurs, or a work is to be done, all eyes are fixed on the person of honest report among the faithful; but, not unfrequently, the true character is found out too late to the detriment of the Christian work he was appointed to. Not so was it with Stephen. The report that spread about him proved in every respect true. He was as good as he was reported to be; he was really a converted man, full of faith, and the Spirit of God induced the Apostles to select him, with six others, all Hellenistic Christian Israelites, to the office of deacon. It had not then this highly respectable name, for they were simply called servants of the Church, appointed to visit the poor and sick and see that their wants were satisfied as far as it lay in their power. What an unspiritual office this was, with many exclaim! Need a man be a genuine Christian, full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, to fill such a purely secular position in life? Anyone, if he is no Christian at all, can see to the wants and necessities of the poor and sick, would be the answer of many a worldly-wise man and woman. We, however, have every reason to believe that in every position of life, however humble and lowly, it is

required that the person holding it should not only be qualified for it but be also trustworthy, and a true Christian will always prove to be so, which even worldly men are well aware of. To visit the poor and sick anyone can do, even if he is no real Christian ; but the difference in the manner in which the same duties are discharged by a Christian or non-Christian the person to be benefited will have little difficulty in finding out. The mere sense of duty, however keenly at first felt, will soon sober down to the coldness of legal obligation, and leave the recipient of your bounties cold and unaffected, if you are not a believing Christian moved and sustained in all you do by the love of God shed abroad in your own heart. There is nothing more chilling and humiliating to the poor and needy than when they are served by officials who are actuated in all they do by the mere sense of legal duty. How many a sensitive poor one there is who would rather starve than avail himself of the workhouse, we know too well. The poor and sick require in their pitiful condition something more than food and raiment, something more than medicine and attendance, for they are human beings, and have hearts and souls which yearn for love and sympathy, comfort and consolation, which the believing and loving Christian can and will most readily give. While being thus a true Christian Samaritan to these unfortunate people you will perform great wonders and miracles among them. Your love and compassion for them will touch their heart and soul and awaken confidence and love towards you. They will look upon you not as an official paid by a society

or church, but as their friend and brother, who is desirous of imparting to them the greatest possible benefit in your power. They will, in loving confidence, lend a willing ear to the message of God's love, which, received with a willing heart, will be to them a continued source of peace, joy and happiness. And in feeling themselves to be children of God they will learn to place a child-like confidence in their Father in heaven, who can supply all their wants and heal all their diseases. Stephen in administering to the bodily wants of those committed to his care, was ever mindful also of their spiritual wants, and in thus caring for their spiritual and temporal interests he performed great wonders and miracles, for the recipients of his bounties became God's loving and trusting children. In thus benefiting others his own faith and love to God and man increased, and he gained in strength and power, felt by friend and foe alike. In doing good to others, in virtue going out of you in the cause of humanity, you will always feel that in giving you really receive. When Stephen was appointed to his office he was full of faith and of the Holy Spirit ; but while faithfully discharging his duties, it was said of him that he was full of power also. Spiritual gifts and graces increase in strength and vigour when rightly employed. Stephen was a man full of faith and power, and as such he stirred up the animosity of those of a different faith and power from his. They were Hellenistic Jews, members of different synagogues in Jerusalem, who disputed with him on religious subjects. They were, however, not in a frame of mind to accept the Christian truth, but rested satisfied

with the creed they professed. They dragged Stephen before the highest law court, before the Sanhedrim, charging him with the crime of heresy, but he neither retracted nor prevaricated, but confessed openly and fearlessly his faith in Christ, and stated the reason on which it was founded. "Whosoever shall confess Me," says Christ, "before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven."

III.—Live a Christian life that you may be able to die a Christian's death is the important lesson the first Christian martyr teaches us. His life was to him the preparation for his death, and this is true of all men. We may not have to suffer such a cruel and barbarous death as he did, but still we all have to die. Death is to each one the climax and consummation of life, hence life is to each one the preparation for it. As our life, so our death will be. Stephen's life, from all we know of him, was a true and genuine Christian one, and he consequently died a Christ-like death. See him, how well prepared he was to go to the place Christ has prepared for His faithful. He stands arraigned before a court which he was convinced would show him no mercy, but would pass on him the severest sentence the law prescribed for heresy. He manifests no fear or anxiety as to his ultimate destiny. He defended himself and his faith in Christ with great wisdom, knowledge, and courage. He not only gave his judges and accusers a long exposition of the scriptural foundation of his faith, but he had the boldness even to charge them with obstinately refusing to be convinced of the saving know-

ledge of Christ. Whilst they were cut to the heart and gnashed on him with their teeth, he maintained his Christian temper and disposition, manifesting a heavenly serenity, a heavenly glory shining out of him like the rays of the sun when breaking through a cloud. Whilst his judges and accusers were in rage at what they considered the daring impudence of the accused in bringing forward charges against them, and while resolving to pass the sentence of death on him, his eye of faith saw the heavens open and the eternal glory that awaited him. When dragged outside the walls of Jerusalem to the place of execution, amid the pelting of stones which shattered his body, he first commended his soul to his Saviour, and then with a loud voice offered up a prayer for his fanatical enemies, and in the very act of doing this he died, or rather, as it reads, he fell asleep. In peace with God and man he fell asleep, to awake in paradise. Such was the life and death of the first Christian martyr, reflecting the power and efficacy of Christ's love on believing hearts. Stephen being dead, yet lives, and speaks in a very solemn manner to our conscience. He has left us an example which it is our duty to follow, whatever our position in life may be. He was undoubtedly a great man, but certainly not in the sense usually understood. He was not a military hero who, by his act of prowess, attracts and influences men; he was not a philosopher advancing truth which is to regulate man's thoughts and actions; but he was a true Christian, living a holy and godly life. His power and wisdom were of a totally different kind from those we have spoken of, they were:

reflected in a holy life and a heroic, peaceful death. And though we cannot all be wise and powerful in the usual sense, we can and should be in the sense in which Stephen was. In the example of a godly Christian life, like his, is presented to us the power and efficacy of God's love in Christ on the honest and believing heart. We all, without exception, ought to live and die in the spirit in which the proto-martyr lived and died. To all the same gracious offer is made, and on all the same gifts may be bestowed. Stephen is generally considered to have been a young man, and if so we must the more admire the wonder-working of God's grace. Had he been permitted to live, and die what is called a natural death, he probably would have accomplished great things in Christ's cause. Being, however, cut down in the flower of life, his life may seem to have been after all a failure. But was it really a failure? We think no life, however short, if lived in a truly Christian spirit, can be a failure; but Stephen's life was not a failure, on the contrary, it was an eminently useful and blessed one. One young man was present at his cruel death and held the clothes of the men that stoned him. He probably had disputed with him about religion, had most probably heard his defence of Christianity in the court, and had most certainly heard his last prayers and saw him die, and this young man at this time was a fanatic Pharisee, and none other than Saul, afterwards Paul, the greatest of the Apostles. The impression all this made upon him was never forgotten, although for a time it was not allowed to influence him in favour of Christ's religion.

Stephen being dead yet speaketh to all of us. His Christian life and death speak with power to our heart and conscience. We feel that thus we ought to live and die, but let us never forget also that we shall be able, by God's grace, to realize it personally if we are united by faith to Christ, who not only teaches us how to live and die, but also supplies us with divine strength to do this with every certainty of being successful. The philosophy of the Cross of Christ enables man to live a godly and useful life, and to die heroically and peacefully, as Stephen did. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."

VII.

Mary Anointing Christ.

MATTHEW XXVI. 10.

"When Jesus understood it, He said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me."

I.—All the Evangelists, with the exception of Luke, describe the feast given to Christ by His friend in Bethany, and all that occurred on this occasion. They vary and differ from each other on some points, but nevertheless supplement each other. We shall relate to you impartially, and we trust correctly, the narrative thus supplemented. Christ arrived on Friday evening at Bethany from Jerusalem, just as the Jewish Sabbath was commencing. And it was on Saturday evening, when the Sabbath was ended, six days before the Passover, that the feast was given, which is to engage our attention. It was held in the house of Simon the Leper; who this Simon was is not stated, nor do we find him mentioned in the Gospels on any other occasion. Even whether he was still alive at this time cannot be ascertained. If he was, he certainly could not have been a leper any more, for he would not then have been living in his house, much less mingling in general society. Whether he was living or dead, this much is certain that the house in which the supper was given was known as that of Simon the Leper. We believe him to have been closely connected with the family whom Christ loved. Whether he was the

father of Lazarus and his sisters, or the husband of Martha, whom he had left a widow, as has been advanced by some expositors, will ever remain uncertain. Present at this repast was Christ with all His disciples, Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. Martha is stated to have again been serving. She must have been highly qualified for domestic work, and took pleasure in being thus useful. Whilst the guests were seated at the table, reclining, as was customary in the East, on a couch, resting on the left side with their faces turned to the table, and stretching their naked feet, freed from the sandals behind them, Mary approached the Saviour. She broke an alabaster box or flask containing very costly nard or spikenard, and poured the contents of it on His head and feet, wiping the latter with her hair. The whole house was filled with the odour of the ointment, and we cannot wonder at this when we hear what the quantity was. Spikenard was a highly prized aromatic oil extracted from the Indian Valerian. The quantity used for the Saviour's anointing is estimated to have been worth £12. Never before in the life of Christ was there expended on Him anything so precious and valuable as a token of love and reverence. He and His disciple were always satisfied when they had their daily wants and necessities supplied, and we are certain that they never cared to enjoy the luxuries of the rich, much less to indulge in their extravagances. Hence we are not surprised to hear that the disciples, or some of them, were indignant at such a waste of so much valuable ointment. In their indignation they exclaimed: "To what purpose is this

waste? for this ointment might have been sold for much and given to the poor." Matthew speaks of all the disciples generally as having thus given vent to their indignation, whilst Mark again speaks only of some having done so. John, however, expressly states that it was the pilfering Judas that passed this opinion on what he deemed a useless waste. And we have every reason to believe that John's statement is more precise, for such a complaint could only have been made by such a heartless man as Judas. At the same time we are of opinion that although it was he that gave expression to his indignation, he only was the interpreter of the feelings entertained on this subject by most of the other disciples. This only confirms the well-known maxim that "evil communications corrupt good manners." The mean spirit of Judas was already beginning to influence the other simple-minded and guileless disciples. Poor Mary! what must her feelings have been to see Christ's disciples thus indignant, and to hear such a cutting remark respecting the act by which she meant to honour their mutual Friend and Master! She thought of having done nothing more than what her love and devotion to Him inspired and prompted her to do, and now she sees the disciples in great indignation about it and considering it a useless waste! How mortifying to find them so cold and indifferent, so calculating and worldly-wise at an act of homage paid to their Lord out of pure and disinterested love and reverence! There she stands, this loving woman, puzzled and perplexed at what she had seen and heard, her eyes fixed steadfastly on Him, on whose behalf she made

the sacrifice. Will He break the bruised reed, will He quench the fervent love of her heart, will He be as cold and calculating as His disciples with their heartless spokesman, will He not see deeper than all these, and will He not understand her feelings and intentions, her love and devotion to Him, as expressed in this broken flask, in this pouring out of the precious ointment? Her faith and love to Him, that prompted her to act as she had done, sustained her in the conviction that He would understand and appreciate the motive by which she was actuated. He would consequently be just and kind to her, and justify her conduct before His disciples. It was done for Him and none other, and He had still to express his opinion about it. And He did speak, and administered a rebuke to them for their harsh and unjust criticism in the words: "Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me."

II.—At the feast in Simon the Leper's house a subject was discussed and at last settled by Him, whom we deem the highest and best authority on such matters. This subject has been, and ever will be, of interest and importance not only to philosophers and moralists but to every thoughtful man. A right conception of it will ever prevent us from rashly judging the actions of others, and thus save them much annoyance and trouble. The subject we mean is none other than as to what constitutes a good action or work. Here, at this feast, given in honour of Christ, an act of Mary not only made different impressions on those that witnessed it, but also called forth two diametrically

opposed opinions or judgments of the same. Mary spending the valuable ointment in anointing Jesus, caused great indignation among His disciples, and Judas gave expression to their and his feelings by saying that it would have been better had the ointment been sold and the money given to the poor. They considered the act independent of the motives of the acting person, and cared little for whom it was done. In their estimation the merit of a particular act consists in its being practical and useful. Judging Mary's act of anointing by itself, they could not see that any good was done by it to anyone, and came to the hasty conclusion that it was sheer and wanton waste. They even went further and declared that by this waste Mary was wronging the poor, many of whom might have been supported in their want and misery by the considerable sum of money spent in purchasing the ointment. However much we may disagree with the judgment of the disciples passed on the act of Mary, we must do them justice in candidly declaring that it could not have been otherwise, since they looked upon it from a utilitarian point of view. Totally different was Christ's judgment, and we believe His to have been not only strictly impartial but correct and just. Mary's action, even viewed by itself, was by no means morally wrong, for the ointment was bought and certainly paid for, and she could do with it what she liked. And a person who can give £12 for a flask of ointment is certainly in a position to give charity to the poor if so disposed. But Christ did not judge Mary's action by itself, but as such actions always ought to be judged, if our judgment is not

to be one-sided and defective. He judged the act according to the intention of the person performing it. If an act is in itself not morally wrong, but is merely in the estimation of others not really productive of good, then such an act must be judged according to the motive of the actor. The motive and intention of an act give it value and importance, make it either good or evil. And we readily grant that such motives and intentions may often be better than the act itself. We, however, maintain that the intrinsic value and merit of an act consists in the principle and motive which prompt to the performance of the same. Christ was fully aware that Mary's act sprang from pure and disinterested love, and by her act she laid open, as it were, her heart beating with sincere affection and devotion to Him. She spoke in a symbolical language, which the disciples were utterly unable to understand, but which the Great Teacher not only understood but fully appreciated the deep significance and meaning of. She expended the precious and valuable ointment on Christ, and thereby clearly and unmistakably evinced to all who have hearts and can understand such things, that she had the right spirit of sacrifice for the object of her love. She cheerfully parted with the best in her possession for Him whom her soul loved and adored, and who was worthy of all man's love and devotion. She spoke through the broken flask and through the flow of ointment, showing forth that the cruel and untimely death awaiting Him in Jerusalem had already touched her loving and sympathising heart and filled it with deep sorrow and grief. Sincere and heartfelt love to Christ is not only divine but also divining. How

well Christ understood the symbolical language, which love and devotion to Him was speaking, His words testify when He said : " For in that she poured this ointment upon My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial." How reassuring to Mary, that her loving act had to fulfil such a high function ! What matters it to her that the disciples were indignant at what she had done, as long as her loved Friend and Master understood it ? If this was right in His sight for whom the act was meant this is all she cared for. He knew her intention, and because it was pure and right He pronounced the action itself *good*. And if He deems it good she is satisfied. Let others see that their intentions make their actions morally good in the sight of Him who seeth in secret. If hell is paved with good intentions, it will certainly not be with such as Mary had when she poured the costly ointment on the Saviour. With such intention, as love and devotion to Christ inspire and prompt to, heaven, not hell, is paved. If Judas's intentions had only been as pure and disinterested as the loving Mary's he would never have become the traitor. " Why trouble ye the woman ? for she hath wrought a good work on Me."

III.—In Christ's estimation a Christian's act or work, of whatever kind it may be, if done out of love and devotion to Him, is a *good* act or work. His disciples, instigated and influenced by Judas, deemed an act or work good only when it was practical and useful. They considered Mary's anointing Christ with such costly ointment a waste, and the value of it as having been a loss to the poor. And such

as are of Judas's mind and disposition, having nothing of the love of Christ in them, consider everything done for Christ, for the promotion and extension of His kingdom among Jew and Gentile, at home or in foreign countries, a mere waste of money, time, and energy, which might be better employed in practical and useful work at home. Those of the Judas type are either utterly ignorant of the Christian's spiritual life, with its duties and obligations, or they wilfully and intentionally speak all manner of evil of the Christian's undertakings, in order if possible to hinder it. The Christian's life, as it is hid with Christ in God, is sustained, influenced, and comforted by the love of God in Christ Jesus, and this love will prompt him to do all things in the strength of this love, and for the object of his love. The Christian, filled with the love of Christ, sees in every man, however ignorant and degraded he may be, to whatever nation or tribe he may belong, a fellow-man and brother for whom the Saviour gave His life as a ransom. And his Saviour who has redeemed and saved him, who has made him free from sin, and brought him nigh to his heavenly Father, has commissioned him to preach the gospel to every creature. Hence the Christian deems it his greatest privilege, as well as his most sacred duty, to promote Christ's kingdom at home and abroad, among Jews and Gentiles. Those who have Cain's mark on them, exclaim: "Am I my brother's keeper"? These heathen nations have so long been happy and contented with their idols and images, with their religion and worship, why trouble and disturb them in that in which they find their

peace and happiness? These Jews have so long lived and prospered under their religion, and are good and peaceful citizens, why preach to them Christ, against whom they have such strong prejudices and dislikings? What have you accomplished with your missionary societies for Jews and heathens already in existence for so many years? If success crowned your efforts, we should indeed not begrudge you your honour and satisfaction, but you can boast of little or even any success worth the name. This is the language of our modern Cains, who like their prototype ask cynically: "Am I my brother's keeper?" "To what purpose is this waste?" asks Judas, the traitor. The money might have been given to the poor, and you could have made happy many homes and families; as if working for Christ does not of necessity imply the care of the poor and needy too. We all know that Christ has identified Himself with all man's wants, woes, and miseries, and has expressly told us that what we are doing to them is the same as if we had done it to Him personally. The believing Christian has ever felt it his sacred duty to care for the poor, for they are Christ's legacy. "The poor," He said, "ye have always with you." And we are certain that those who support missionary societies are also those who do all they can to remove or mitigate the wants and miseries of their fellow-men. We indeed cannot expect that those of the Judas type should be able or willing to understand the Christian's motives in his actions. And because they do not, we must always be prepared to expect that cold water will be thrown on our Christian enthusiasm, and that all our

actions will be misjudged. They consider everything done for Christ a mere waste, whilst the believing Christian knows that Christ esteems everything done for Him as a good work. And a good work has its own intrinsic value, and must sooner or later produce the desired effect. The world judges of the merit of a work by its immediate success ; in fact the world worships success. The successful man is honoured and praised, but as soon as he meets with reverses his glory begins to fade among men. Not so the Christian in his work for Christ. Whatever the amount of success his may be, even if there is nothing visible, he nevertheless continues in faith and hope, because he is fully persuaded that he works for a Master who values and appreciates the motives and intentions of His faithful people. And what is done out of pure and disinterested love and devotion to the Saviour, be it great or small, visible or invisible to the eyes of others, meets the approval of Him who looketh deeper than man does. The world may deride, jeer, and sneer at our Christian enterprises, as long as Christ approves of the motive and principle which stimulate us to activity ; every act of ours will be deemed by Him as being good. And the consciousness that such is the case will sustain and uphold us in every trial and perplexity connected with the work we are engaged in. Love and devotion to the Saviour and His cause will always be the most powerful stimulant to self-denying acts for the good of others. Our faith in Christ will manifest its strength and vitality by the work we do for Christ, the object of our souls' love and adora-

tion. We may be in a position and condition of life when we can, comparatively speaking, do little for Him who has done so much for us. But let us ever keep in mind that Christ is not a cruel and hard taskmaster, exacting from us more than we can give. Let that cheer and sustain us in our Christian activity, that He looks primarily on the motives of our actions, and if they are pure, there is no need of discouragement. Mary had indeed expended very precious ointment on Him, which cost her a large amount of money. She was no doubt wealthy, and had done in reality, as Christ tells us, *what she could*. Others may perhaps be able to do much more, or perhaps much less for Him, but of all Christ's faithful it is expected that they will do for Him and His cause all they can. Let what Christ said of Mary's motive and action be also said of all our motives and all our actions, "She has wrought," He said, "a *good* work on Me. She has done what she could."

VIII.

The Christian Law of Sacrifice.

LUKE IX. 24.

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it."

I.—Our text speaks of man's life as capable of being lost, although all is done to preserve it, and again of a life that is willingly sacrificed for the sake of Christ and yet saved. It speaks in reality of one and the same life that can either be lost or saved: all depends upon the spirit animating us, upon our will and inclination, for either the one or the other must inevitably take place. The losing will be effected if our only aim and object is to maintain our natural self, and to allow it to develop and manifest itself according to its natural power and tendency. On the other hand, the saving will be effected, if we not only restrict its natural power and inclination, but allow it to be inspired by the spirit of abnegation, devotion and self-surrender. Man's life, Christ gives us to understand, has this double nature; it can be preserved and yet in reality be lost, and it can, to all appearances, be lost and yet in reality be saved. There is no doubt that Christ speaks in our text of the absolute necessity of sacrificing that nature of ours which asserts its sinful self, and this for His sake, and He assures us that in so doing we shall save our life. And it is equally clear and certain,

that He is anxious to convey to us the warning that if we refuse to make this sacrifice required of us, thinking by so doing to save our life, we shall nevertheless certainly lose it. The seeming life asserting self, He assures us, is actual death, whilst the seeming death in the voluntary offering of self, is actual life. None can be a member of His kingdom, none can be truly His disciple and follower, who refuses to make the sacrifice demanded of him for His sake. Christ can only mean that life which in all its thoughts, feelings, and actions revolves around itself, and is called selfishness, which is itself sin. Selfishness is that spirit, temper, and disposition of a man bent on seeking after and pursuing all that can be laid hold of, that promises enjoyment and gratification, with no thought and feeling for the interests and wants of others. A selfish man thinks only of himself, loves only himself, feels only for himself, and in all his actions he seeks only his own interest, his own aggrandizement and glorification. Others have only so much value and interest to him, according as they can be made use of in serving his selfish purposes, but he himself would not willingly be of the least value and interest to others. Absorbed in self he is in reality the most lonely man in the world. "Selfishness is that state which the mythology of ancient times symbolized in the ever-revolving wheel of Ixion, in the vessels of the Danaides wherein nothing would abide, in the restless stone of Sisypheus, in the hunger and thirst of Tantalus, ever craving, with the object of his craving playing against his lips. It is that state in which, as has been powerfully expressed, 'Man rushes from desire into

enjoyment, and pines amid enjoyment from desire.' " Hence the selfish man is the most dissatisfied, miserable man, as that passionate craving within him for more, of whatever nature or kind it may be, is the insatiable worm that eats like a cancer the heart's life blood. A selfish life is already hell on earth, it is spiritual death; let, however, no one think that a selfish man is not capable of making a sacrifice for others. He is forced to do so by a variety of circumstances and conditions over which he has no control. He lives in a society which is based and maintained on the principle that the interest of the individual is often to be sacrificed for the interest of the many collectively, be it a community or state. He is not only often obliged to make such sacrifices much against his will and inclination, he does it often enough of his own free will, but only to further his own selfish ends. Life is so constituted that nothing worth having can be obtained without a sacrifice of some kind or other. What will not a selfish man give in exchange for his idol? The miser will submit to the severest deprivation, starve himself to death, mortify all human affection, and this all for the sake of adding one coin to another, to be left behind him after his death, to be afterwards used by those who can owe him no debt of gratitude. He was already dead to them whilst living, and his real death was often desired, in order to knock the gold bag out of his hands. The ambitious man will labour and toil incessantly, deprive himself of joys and comforts to attain position, rank, and power, not with the object of being useful to others, but solely to gratify his selfish desires. The

vindictive man will even risk his life for the sake of satisfying his revenge. We might enumerate many similar sacrifices selfishness makes either voluntarily or involuntarily, but they all have no virtue or merit in themselves, as not designed to benefit others. Christ calls a selfish life a lost life, and selfish as man may be, selfishness, when discovered, is abhorred and condemned by every right-minded man. "Whosoever will save his life," says Christ, "shall lose it."

II.—Nature, every order of beings, living beings and those things without life, teach us the great and salutary lesson that they were created and exist, not for themselves, but for the sake of ministering to each other. The sun sheds its light on the earth, and on all its sister planets, and this good earth of ours is ministering year by year to the wants of myriads of living beings, and is ever rewarding the industry of man an hundred and a thousandfold. It is desolate where there is no man to cultivate it and take the rich bounties it offers as a reward for his labour. The vegetable world exists to minister to the wants of the animal world, and in order not to be interrupted in so doing, it has to provide for its own reproduction, and in order to live again in its offspring, it loses its own life. In the animal kingdom we may observe manifold and various examples of like self-sacrificing ministrations. In fact, all created things exist, not for their own sake, but for others. And selfish as man is, the instinct of sacrifice has at all times been felt more or less powerfully, and found its adequate expression in acts of self-denial. Men have been found in all times who have

forgotten self in the pursuit of a noble and worthy object, and have by diligence and perseverance overcome the greatest hindrances and obstacles, and accomplished great things in knowledge and science, in art and literature, in order to promote the intellectual, moral, spiritual, and physical well-being of their fellow men. Men have been found, who, in yielding to this instinct of sacrifice, have parted readily with all they prized and valued, to the honour and service of the divinity they worshipped. No religion without sacrifice. The magnificent temples built, the costly decorations spent on them, and the rich provision made for the maintenance of public worship, bear testimony to the working of this instinct towards God. And it must be attributed to this instinct of sacrifice finding an erroneous interpretation among some uncultivated nations and tribes, that men have been led to offer up human sacrifices. Man has ever felt that his life belongs to Him who gave it, and that any pollution by sin and guilt needs to be atoned for by a sacrifice of some kind or other. No religion without sacrifice, but no humanity without sacrifice ! The love and devotion of parents towards their children, of children towards their parents, the husband towards the wife and the wife towards the husband, the friend towards the friend, the patriot towards his country, the rich towards the poor, the wise towards the ignorant, the strong towards the weak, and similar displays of self-surrender, are sacrifices made in the interest of humanity, suggested and prompted by the instinct of sacrifice in us. Self-denial and self-sacrifice would have been more natural to man, but for the evil influence selfishness, un-

controlled and unsuppressed, has on man. And it is owing to this sinful self in us, that it requires a great effort on the part of man, and divine assistance, to enable him to battle against it and subdue it. To deny self, to go out of self and identify oneself with the woes and miseries of others, to live only in and for others, a virtuous, sympathising life, will never be effected without crucifying our lusts and passions, without battling against sinful suggestions, propensities, and inclinations. The law of true godliness, the law of a true humanity, the true life of man, imperatively demand the sacrifice of self. This was felt, more or less, by every true man, long before the appearance of Christ, but it was Christ who recognized and proclaimed it as the fundamental law of duty binding on every member of His kingdom. It was the one great truth which was embodied in His whole life and action, from His birth to His death, from the beginning of His public ministry to His death on the cross. During His whole life He ever made His will subservient to the will of His Father in Heaven, and He ever lived for the good of others, for the spiritual benefit of the whole human race. He daily denied and crucified self towards God and man; hence He daily had His Gethsemane, and His Calvary; He daily bore His cross. And the sole motive and the one secret spring of His unselfish life, was unbounded love and compassion towards man, towards all men without distinction. His opponents never ventured to say that He lived for Himself, that He entertained thoughts of self-aggrandizement, was advancing His own interest or seeking His own glory. "He saved others, Himself He cannot save," was

the unconscious testimony borne by an enemy. He lost His precious life, but in losing the life of self He took it again as the victorious conqueror out of the grasp of the defeated enemy of the human race, and thereby secured eternal life for us.

III.—It is a remarkable feature in the religion of Christ, that the true and devoted professors of it stand in such close relation to Christ, their Saviour, that they are animated by the same spirit, actuated by the same motives, and interested in the same objects as He was when on earth. They have also to pass through similar trials and sufferings, to endure similar pains and losses, as He has done for them and for all believers in all ages. Christ's faithful disciples have continually to exercise self-denial, have daily to take up their cross, have to partake of His sufferings, bear one another's burdens, lose their life of self, in order to gain the higher, nobler life, the life hid with Christ in God. And the secret motive of their thoughts, feelings and actions, is the love of Christ which faith in Him has kindled within them. In shedding abroad His vicarious love into our willing and believing hearts, the life of self is lost, and a life of holy love and devotion towards God and man is born within us from above. Since all true and genuine love is vicarious, prompting loving men to sacrifice their personal interest to promote the interest of the objects of their love, it would indeed be strange were the love that Christ has kindled within us not meant to be vicarious, to be spent on behalf of others. The believing Christian's love proceeds from

Him who bore our sorrows and our griefs, who laid down His life for the redemption of mankind, and this, its vicarious nature and efficacy, is preserved in the heart and soul of every true Christian. All believing Christians' love is pre-eminently vicarious, suffering and sympathizing with the objects of their love, bearing their burdens, struggling with their sorrows, prompting their true interests and well-being, spreading light and comfort around them. Their object of love is, next to God, their fellow-men. The Christian's love alone can be called vicarious in the truest sense of the word, since he alone having been reconciled with his God through Christ, the Saviour, can suffer for others.

Christian love is the fulfilment of the law, the fundamental law of Christ's religion, and in the discharge of this, the Christian's most sacred duty, he will have constantly to exercise self-denials, he will have his Gethsemane, daily to bear his cross, and may perhaps be called upon to have his Calvary, to lay down his life as a martyr to his conviction. He will, however, never feel so happy and cheerful, so essentially blessed, as when he suffers for the good of others. We never feel so truly happy as when we make others happy ; we never realize so much the comforts and blessings of our own life, as when we have helped others ; and we never are so conscious of the power and efficacy of Christ's redeeming love, as when we have been instrumental in bringing the sinful and vicious, the fallen and outcast, the ignorant and superstitious, to the Friend of sinners.

Thus, doing good to others cannot be accomplished

without some sacrifice, but it carries with it its own compensation—its own reward. It is said of Christ, that “for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame.” To procure eternal salvation for countless human beings filled His loving heart with joy, and made Him forget the great price He paid. In the happiness of others He saw cause for joy and rejoicing. The whole face of the earth would be changed, society would be changed, and man would bless Christ, if all those who profess to be His were filled with His love. There is no doubt there are many such devoted followers of Christ, who are the salt of the world, partakers of Christ’s suffering, but, alas! their number is small. Selfishness, the vice of the fallen, is still dominant, and this not rarely in men and women professing to be Christians. They are not willing for Christ’s sake to deny themselves, to lose their life of self, and in thus shrinking from this Christian sacrifice demanded of them by the law of Christ, they evince that the love of Christ is not in them. They labour under the dangerous delusion that all the sacrifice they need Christ has already, once for all, offered for them. There cannot possibly be a more pernicious and dangerous error than this, for such would simply mean that Christ suffered and lost His life of sinless self that those who believe in Him might cherish and maintain their sinful self, their selfishness. No, self must be denied and crucified, and Christ’s love must take its place in our heart and affections; this is the loss and the gain of which Christ speaks in our text, and is often enough inculcated by Him and His apostles.

No loss, no gain ; no cross, no crown ; is the fundamental law of Christ's spiritual kingdom. The Christian law of sacrifice is also misrepresented and caricatured by the false gospel of asceticism. Self-imposed trials, self-inflicted punishment, austerities practised with the view to expiate sin and guilt, and attain to a higher degree of sanctity by such works of supererogation, is not Christian, but heathenish. They foster pride and produce a most repulsive and unamiable temper. It is, rather, self-suppression, leaving the soul famished and unproductive of any good to others. The true Christian law of sacrifice requires that self should be lost, and replaced by the sanctifying love of Christ, which, while it imparts a new, peaceful, and blissful life, stimulates us to promoting the true well-being of our fellow men at all cost and at all price. The greatest benefit conferred upon mankind has been accomplished through the vicarious suffering of Christ, the innocent for the guilty, "the just for the unjust," and no great good is done in this world without sacrifice, which is the Christian's most reasonable and obligatory service. We shall, with joy and gladness, obey this royal law of love, if our hearts are filled and moved by the love of God in Christ Jesus. In this suffering for the sake of Christ we shall, indeed, lose the life of self, but save the life born of God and destined to live for ever with God.

IX.

Hypocrisy.

LUKE XII. 1.

"In the meantime, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, He began to say unto His disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

I.—The warning Christ gave to His disciples in the presence of a large concourse of people, and which is brought before us in our text, is so clearly and forcibly expressed as to be intelligible as soon as heard or read. They were, first of all, to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and this for the very simple reason because it is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is a vice professedly condemned and abhorred by all civilized nations, and yet not unfrequently met with amongst them, even among those who call themselves after Him who often had occasion to denounce it in the strongest and severest manner possible. The name this vice bears has had the great misfortune in the course of time to lose the original meaning it had in its own country during its classical period. It is a pure Greek word, and employed by the classical writers to denote play-acting, and hence, a play-actor was called a hypocrite. It would, however, offend none if told that in a certain sense all men are actors, for all have to play their part in this world, some more important than others, and of all it is expected that they each, individually, shall play their part right and well.

“All the world’s a stage,” says Shakspeare, “and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages.” I am convinced that Shakspeare did not mean to convey to us the startling and revolting idea that all men and women were acting the part of dissemblers or hypocrites on “this universal theatre,” either concealing what they are, or feigning to be what they are not. The great dramatist knew man, his nature, and character, much better. There is no doubt that, strictly speaking, no man is in reality and truth so good, pure, and disinterested in all his thoughts, feelings, and actions, as he may appear to his fellow-man; for we are all sinful creatures, having constantly to battle against evil propensities and inclinations against selfishness and covetousness. In our intercourse with our fellow-man we need not to dwell on this our sinfulness, weakness, and failings, as none of us can lay claim to be exempted from them; but we have a right to demand from everyone that he be honest, true, and trustworthy in his dealings with others, as no social, peaceful, and prosperous life can exist without these virtues. And, to the honour of mankind be it said, that there are hosts of men and women whose deeds correspond with their word, whose practice harmonizes with their profession, who lead a consistent, virtuous life. There are men and women who have a keen sense of duty, who have a sympathizing heart for the woes and miseries of others, who have a tender conscience as regards the principles of right and wrong, and whose

character is true and transparent. Whether there are many or few such men and women we would not undertake to discuss, but certain it is that there are not few who really dissemble and, for reasons of their own, are not that exactly they pretend to be and would fain persuade others they really are. These are impenetrable and perplexing characters, taciturn and reserved sometimes to such excess that we lose all patience with them and cannot make up our mind to place confidence in them. They need not on this account be dissemblers or hypocrites, it may be that their strange behaviour is the result of their natural disposition or tendency, or it may be that they are influenced by self-interest or impure motives to act thus. Whilst there are many men and women honest, true, and trustworthy, it cannot be denied that there are enough in all positions and conditions of life, who have, as it were, two lives in them, whose voice is that of Jacob, whilst their hands are those of Esau, who practise the unenviable art of veiling or hiding their real thoughts, feelings, and character, and sometimes even with the intention of deceiving. There are dissemblers of different degrees, yea, even hypocrites in the secular world, as it is called, in contradistinction to the religious world; but more generally is the vice of dissembling or hypocrisy attributed to men and women professing religion. Outward sanctity in word and conduct, while secretly leading an immoral life; pretending to believe and adhere to certain doctrines, whilst in their innermost heart disbelieving them; deliberately and without remorse deceiving others and not at all self-deceived, this is the worst kind of

hypocrisy, and deserves the strongest reprobation from every right-minded man. Unbelievers are too prone to charge every believing Christian with this heinous vice, because they cannot, or rather will not, concede the possibility that honest and truth-loving men can be convinced of the truth of Christianity. We, however, think better things of man in general than to believe that there are many such villains playing designedly the part of a hypocrite of such revolting nature. If there are such they must be very few indeed, and can at best not carry on this cheating practice for any considerable time without running the risk of being unmasked. There are, however, perhaps more than we may be willing to concede of such religious hypocrites, who, being self-deceived, go on deceiving others. Such would be horror-struck at the mere idea that they are suspected of practising this vice. Hypocrisy, of whatever kind or description, is denounced by Christ, when He says: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

II.—"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy," is the injunction Christ has given to His disciples. Pharisaism took its rise with men who were bent on meriting heaven's approval, and gain power and influence among the Jewish people by an over-scrupulous attention being paid, not to the spirit of God's revelation, but to the mere letter of it. The law of Moses was, in their estimation, not strict, not explicit enough regarding many things and circumstances having reference to a truly religious life. They pictured to themselves a holy life to be one where

everything is regulated by laws and precepts, and scrupulous attention being paid to them, in order to attain the highest degree of sanctity they aspired to. The law of Moses, they thought, ought to have been more stringent and explicit to meet all the emergencies of a scrupulous, religious life, and as no second Moses, endowed with divine authority, was forthcoming, and feeling no inclination to cultivate those spiritual virtues and graces of which the prophets spoke to them with such holy zeal and fervent eloquence, they ventured to make additions to the law of Moses, and give an explanation to it, which was often far-fetched, and even perverted it. Once having dared to make additions, and claiming for them the same authority as the laws of Moses, they went on doing the same with a zeal worthy of a better cause. They multiplied laws and precepts, prescribed innumerable ceremonies and observances, and, to do them justice, we must also state that they themselves were most scrupulous to act in accordance with them. They cultivated an outward sanctity, and were eager for the praise of man. Their outward appearance was, on the whole, blameless, in accordance with the standard of right and wrong they themselves had established. They tried to live up to their religious creed in the sight of man, but were, alas ! false and untrue inwardly to Him who seeth in secret. They neglected to cultivate religious virtues and graces, the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith, but were scrupulous in making long and loud prayers, in practising divers ablutions and immersions, and careful of paying tithes even in the

least matters, mint, anise, and cummin. They strove hard after power and influence, became proud, arrogant and fanatic, intolerant of any other creed but their own. They were "blind leaders of the blind," being deceived they deceived others. The example of the apostle Paul will illustrate and confirm the opinion we have advanced respecting the Pharisees. He was, as he himself says, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, brought up in the teaching of the Pharisees at the feet of Gamaliel; and, until his conversion to Christianity, was sincerely and devotedly attached to it. He never afterwards said that either he or any of his brother Pharisees were designedly dissembling in their Pharisaical religion, when they boasted of being able to give full satisfaction to its requirements. On the contrary, in reviewing his Pharisaical life he says: "As touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." In this remarkable confession, the veracity of which none will call in question who know anything about the life and activity of the greatest apostle, we have the candid opinion of one of the most candid of the Pharisees, regarding the pernicious effect of their dangerous system of religion. We are astonished to hear him say that, as a Pharisee, he considered himself to have obtained the height of perfection, answering so fully and correctly the requirements of the righteousness which is in the law, as to say unblushingly that he was blameless. When we consider that the ten commandments belonged to this law, and when we further bear in mind, that the prophets were read on every

Sabbath day in the synagogue, and their moral teaching must have been known, we are simply amazed at the large amount of self-deception that must have been practised by the Pharisees, the blind leaders of the blind. What should we say of a Christian were he to make a similar confession as to being blameless touching the requirements of his religion? That such self-deceived men should be intolerant bigots and fanatics, does not surprise us, for men who lay more stress upon an exact creed of their own framing, than upon a religious life, cannot brook any difference of opinion. Of such metal the inquisitors were made, who burnt and killed their thousands and tens of thousands "for the glory of God." The Pharisees persecuted to the utmost of their power Christ, and did not rest until they had succeeded in getting the sentence of death passed on Him and carried out. And Paul, their faithful disciple as long as he was among them, had made havoc of the Church, entering into "every house and, haling men and women, committed them to prison." Such was and is the spirit, temper, and disposition, the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy—being deceived they deceive others.

III.—"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." The warning of Christ is in force at all times, and is ever directed primarily to those who profess to be His disciples. We need not warn the infidel not to simulate Christian piety, for he is not willing to be called a Christian, nor to pass as such, although the warning not to dissimulate, to be free from the leaven of the Pharisees, might be of great use to him also could it be brought home

to him. His obstinate refusal to give heed to the message of salvation may be attributed to his self-deception too, overrating his wisdom and abilities, priding himself on his goodness and righteousness, whilst being ignorant of the righteousness that is of God. The injunction of Christ to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees is, however, directed to His disciples, to believing Christians, as they are constantly in danger of letting this subtle insinuating evil steal into them, and spread itself throughout their soul. The danger of hypocrisy is greater among Protestants than among Romanists, and this for the simple reason that Protestantism, if pure and true, inculcates a spiritual religion, a life of faith, hope, and love, a life of holiness and godliness, a life hid with Christ in God, striving after light and truth, after moral perfection; whilst in Romanism the greatest stress is laid on compliance with the laws and ceremonies of the Church. A Romanist, if he feels so inclined, may easily go through his daily routine of devotion, do all the Church requires of him, without being obliged to cover the inconsistency between the inward and the outward, and it would be difficult to suspect him of dissimulation. Not so the Protestant. He is constantly admonished that no merit, no act of his can accomplish his salvation, but that it is a free gift of God. It is required of him to be true and faithful in small as well as in great matters, and this in the sight of Him before whom our hearts lie bare, and who is acquainted with the motives of all our actions. And still this self-deception, so fully exposed and condemned by Christ, is often practised by His professed

followers, because we are not on our guard, and allow the leaven of Pharisaism to steal into our hearts, corrupting and falsifying our Christian character and being. If a man is not honest and true before Him who seeth in secret, we may be sure that we will not be so before man. And in order to be right before God it is necessary constantly to practise watchfulness over the secret workings of our heart, holding constantly before us the divine mirror of God's revelation, and be obedient to the divine voice that speaks to us, counselling, admonishing, or correcting us. Impartial self-examination is the first duty of every Christian. "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." We find, alas! too much of it even among orthodox Christians. When we see men professing to be ruled, guided, and influenced by Christ and His religion, by His example and precept, and yet are proud, arrogant, intolerant, and fanatic, do we not seem to have within us two different and opposing lives, perhaps without our knowledge, as much as the Pharisees in the days of Christ? Are these two lives, an outward and inward one, not playing a conflicting part? Is the outward life to be all religious, whilst the inward is perhaps all irreligious or not at all changed for the better, not at all moulded and renewed by the Spirit of God's holy and sanctifying love? "A goodly apple rotten in the heart," Shakspeare describes this double life to be. O, let us beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. Let us not assume to be placed here on earth to be accusers of the brethren, to sit in judgment over others and pretend to have the keys of heaven in our hands to admit only those

whose creed agrees with ours. This is what the Pharisees of old did, from whose leaven Christ is anxious that His disciples should be entirely free. "Judge not that ye might not be judged" is His precept. Remember that we all shall have one day to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. If we are His disciples, united to Him by faith and love, renewed and influenced by His Spirit, then will our life and actions be the best testimony of the renewing power of God's love to those who are strangers to it. "Let love be without dissimulation" is the injunction of the Apostle Paul. Life is serious, life is earnest, because the responsibility of it is great. If we are true to ourselves, to our highest and best interests, we must, above all things, be true to God, and if we are true to God and His Christ we are advancing our eternal well-being, and will do all that lies in our power to promote the well-being of our neighbour. This is true wisdom, the wisdom that is from above, of which the Apostle James says, that "it is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality—or rather without wrangling, and without hypocrisy."

X.

The Fate of a Court Preacher.

MARK VI. 14-29.

"And king Herod heard of Him; (for His name was spread abroad;) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him. Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets. But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead. For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife. therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not: for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high-captains, and chief estates of Galilee; and when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom. And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by-and-by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother. And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb."

I.—Herod, of whom our text speaks, was the son of that Herod who reigned over Judea when Christ was born, and whom flatterers called the Great, although great only in crimes of the deepest and blackest die. The Herod we have before us, is known as Herod Antipas, who at the death of his father became Tetrarch of Galilee and Peræa and thus was our Saviour's lawful sovereign. This Antipas, as he is represented in the Gospels and by the Jewish historian Josephus, is not a character that we can admire. He was unscrupulous, tyrannical, and weak. He was cruel, and his cruelty was nursed by cunning and followed

by remorse. Like an eastern despot, he was capricious, sensual, and superstitious. He was thoroughly worldly, loving the pleasures and enjoyments of sense, and being greedy of power, fame, and honour, he would purchase any of these of the Roman emperor by base flattery. We might enumerate more such or similar traits in his character, but we think those mentioned quite sufficient to give an adequate idea of the man with whom John the Baptist had the misfortune to be brought into contact. If such little despots cannot be removed altogether, they had better be shunned, as one shuns contagious disease. And we may be sure that if the Baptist had consulted his own personal comfort and security he would have remained at an immeasurably great distance from him, but as the servant of God, intrusted with a divine commission to every man without exception, he had to go where his duty led him. His was a very onerous and perilous task, that of exposing the sins and follies of men, and be made instrumental, if possible, in leading them to repentance. And to fulfil this, his commission, he had to wander about and to speak to the heart and conscience of all with whom he might be brought into contact. He may have often been obliged to generalize his admonition, but whenever he knew any particular sins or failings of individuals or classes of men before him, he fearlessly exposed them. He was a truth-loving man, and thoroughly persuaded that it was better for man to know the nature of the moral disease which endangers his spiritual life, than to be left in ignorance about it. Man must be told the whole truth respect-

ing that disease, and be directed to Him who is the divinely appointed physician for such diseases. This was John's office, and we know with what devotion and self-denial he discharged all its duties. They imposed upon him the necessity of leading a wandering life, moving about, and everywhere preaching repentance and the approach of the kingdom of God. In these, his wanderings, he came into Antipas's country. The sovereign, hearing of the formidable preacher's movements, went to see and hear him. John, knowing what must have been generally known—that Antipas had enticed away his half-brother, Philip's, wife, Herodias, and was living with her as his wife—plainly and forcibly told him, "It is not lawful for thee to have her." At the instigation of Herodias John was seized and put into prison, for what Antipas and Herodias considered a great offence. Ordinary people cannot so quickly revenge themselves for what *they* may consider an insult offered to them, but a despotic tyrant enjoys this exceptionable advantage. It is a sweet prerogative with such despots to be able at once to cool their anger by putting the daring offender under lock and key. With such potentates *might is right*. John was, indeed, in possession of a far greater power and might than ever any king or emperor as such enjoyed, and this was no other than truth and justice. *His right was his might*. It was, indeed, not recognized by such persons as Antipas and Herodias, but treated as if utterly powerless and even deserving the severest punishment. John could, however, appeal to the highest, the infallible Judge in his justifica-

tion, and safely leave his case in His hands. In the meantime Antipas, acting on the principle that *might is right*, threw John into prison for no other offence than having dared to utter a truth odious to him. He was certainly not the first man who suffered such a fate for such an offence. Men as noble, heroic, and truth-loving, before him had suffered for the same cause, and not a few since his time have experienced similar treatment. But such men, suffering for truth's sake, are in a prison truly free, whilst persons like Antipas and Herodias are, even in a palace, not free, because slaves to sin and iniquity. Even in a prison, a man with a quiet conscience can rejoice that he is deemed worthy to suffer for truth's sake, whilst in a palace crowned libertines need large doses of artificial stimulants to lull their troubled and disquieted conscience into stupor. Where man is with his God, his trust in Him, with his love for divine truth, with his conscience void of offence, there, though it be even a dungeon, is in reality the house of God, the gate of heaven to him; whilst where man is with his sins and vices, be it even in a palace, it is, nevertheless, to him a den of iniquity, the gate of hell.

II.—John the Baptist was imprisoned in Machaerus, a mountain fortress on the steep height of the valley pass which separates Mount Abarim from Mount Pisgah, to which region tradition assigns the grave of Moses. This fortress was, after that of Jerusalem, the strongest in the whole of Palestine. Its turrets and watch-towers were expressly built for the purpose of keeping a look-out on the neighbouring Arabs. The place had a warm spring called

“En-eglaim” or “the spring of calves,” and it was from its waters that Herod the Great sought to derive benefit in his last illness. And it was he who had built some magnificent palaces in this airy castle. It was a delightful spot with a salubrious climate; and we can well understand that Antipas should have made it his second residence. For the Baptist, however, who was confined here against his will and inclination, it was, nevertheless, a prison. And we should naturally have expected to find him treated as a prisoner on a grave charge. We are, however, greatly surprised to hear that not only was he not treated as such, but that even a great honour had been conferred upon him, and this was no other than being raised to the high dignity of a court preacher. The man who had grievously wronged him in degrading him to the position of a prisoner, he it was that raised him thus. The prison chamber of John was virtually turned into a court chapel, and the prisoner himself is the appointed court chaplain. All things augured well for the fortunate Baptist so highly exalted. Herod feared him, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and was anxious to protect him from the fury of Herodias, who lusted after his blood. We ask in astonishment, what had happened to produce such a happy turn for the illustrious prisoner? Has he lowered the standard of his moral requirements, so as to come down to the level of that of his princely libertine? Has he become lax in his moral and religious principles, and less exacting now than before he had such a high honour conferred upon him? Had it been so, he was not the first,

who, in a similar position, conformed his principles to those of his auditors as much as worldly wisdom would allow, and he would most certainly also not have been the last. There have been, at all times, court preachers, and even men held in great respect for their piety, eloquence, and learning, who have, nevertheless, lacked the moral courage to exact from royalty the same unconditional obedience to the laws of religion and morality as from others not so highly exalted. There have been, on the other hand, court preachers, who, like the celebrated Massillon, courageously exposed the vices and follies of the great and mighty of this world, and endeavoured to rouse them to a sense of duty towards God and man. It was to Massillon that Louis XIV. said : " My father, I have heard many great orators in my chapel, and I have been greatly pleased, but as often as I have heard *you*, I was greatly displeased with myself." We know it as a fact, that the favour the Baptist enjoyed with Herod, and the kind treatment he received of him, did *not* induce him to alter or pervert his principles of right and wrong, or stoop to flatter him to whom he owed so much, and in whose power it was to take his life under any pretext. Whether bond or free, prisoner or chaplain, living or dying, at all times and in all conditions, the Baptist felt it his most sacred duty to preach nothing but the truth, and that in its simplicity and purity. He thought all may change either for better or worse, but truth will and must remain changeless. And we may be sure that the man of undaunted courage and unbending rectitude must ever and anon have told the exalted sinner : " It is

not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." We might have expected that Herod would not have been able to stand even one such conscience-disturbing discourse, and must in his royal displeasure at once have shut the mouth that uttered it. We are fortunately not left in ignorance as to the effect of John's preaching on him, for we are expressly told that he heard him gladly. What more could a faithful preacher of the truth expect of his hearers than what John witnessed in Herod? He respected John, protected him from any violence on the part of Herodias, gladly listened to his words. What more, we ask, could any minister of Christ's Gospel expect of his hearers? If he sees such promising results of his preaching as John saw in his hearer, might he not be justified in entertaining the hope that that sinner will be converted to God? Whether John expected such a conversion of Herod, we do not know; but we think that he had sufficient knowledge of the character and disposition of the man as to defer the hope until he saw that he not only listened gladly, but also acted gladly as he was admonished to do. Little did Herod know the deceitfulness of his own heart, or the effect truth, however gladly heard, will have on a man not willing sincerely and honestly to obey its demands. Divine truth even *gladly* heard, if it does not subdue our hearts and affections, and influence us to lead a life in harmony with it, will surely harden, if not deaden, both. Hence we are so often warned in Holy Writ not to trifle with the truth we hear, but at once heartily to accept it. "To-day," it is said, "lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

III.—The sin that besets us and keeps us captive under its tyrannical power, will, sooner or later, if not withstood, effect our ruin, and this often already here on earth. History as well as our own experience can furnish us with many instances of this kind, but for our present purpose it will be quite sufficient to illustrate this in the example of Herod Antipas. His besetting sin, justly and forcibly exposed by the Baptist in this one single sentence: "It is not lawful for thee to have her," was the main cause of all the calamities that befell him and his government. To it can be ascribed the loss of his dominion and his being compelled to live and die in exile. But what is the loss of all earthly possessions to the loss of peace of soul? What on earth can quiet a tortured conscience that feels the guilt of having shed innocent blood? And such a heavy guilt Herod brought on his conscience, when, in an evil moment, he gave his consent to have the Baptist beheaded. He indeed had pledged his word by an oath to grant Herodias's daughter any wish she might express, and consequently could not have known that she would have been instigated by her wretched mother to make such an iniquitous demand of him as there and then to have the head of John brought in a charger, though he had the power and authority flatly to refuse it when made known to him as being criminal in the sight of God and man. He would probably have acted thus humanely and justly had he not accustomed himself to violate with impunity the laws of God and man. And it is really a theatrical farce to affect being aggrieved that he was obliged to concede to the demand of the

damsel because bound to do it by an oath, as if such an oath could ever be considered binding by any law of God or man. And such a man as Herod Antipas, without moral and religious principles, affects to be afraid that his *honour* was at stake with his courtiers were he not to redeem this, his pledge. Shall we laugh or weep at such a peculiar conception of *honour*? Were not the case of too serious a nature we might have been tempted to laugh heartily at the little tyrant's strange idea of honour. We are, however, horror-stricken and disgusted when we see the Baptist's head brought in a charger before the large assembly of guests in the palace, and all gloating on this ghastly spectacle, the reward of a damsel's dance. Forgotten was the respect he had for the holy and righteous man whom he heard *gladly*, and whose admonitions had so often perplexed him as to the consequences of his sinful life and conduct. Forgotten is all on this day on which he celebrates the anniversary of his birth. On this day he has invited all his courtiers, and he wants not only to amuse them, but also himself to be amused and kept in a cheerful mood. He is highly pleased with the daring performances of Herodias's daughter, and willing to give anything in his power as a token of his royal pleasure. The price is named, and though deemed even too high for an Antipas, is nevertheless given. The Baptist is executed, and the head brought in a charger as a sure evidence that the stipulated price was actually paid. The bloody deed is done in spite of Herod's affected grief, for he considers himself a man of *honour*! The deed is the blackest and

foulest even an Antipas had as yet done, and holds him up to all succeeding generations as a monster of iniquity. The deed cannot be undone, the murdered man cannot even by a royal will be brought back to life again. Yet though the murdered man is dead and was buried by his mourning disciples, he *lives* to torture the murderer's conscience and make it a hell to him. The innocent blood shed cries aloud to Heaven for vengeance, cries aloud in Herod's soul and allows him no peace on his throne, no peace in his exile. When he heard about the doings of Christ, he cried out to his servants, "This is John the Baptist, he is risen from the dead, and therefore do these powers work in him." John is not and will not be dead for Herod, but it would, after all, have been an unenviable life, had he lived only for the sole purpose of torturing his murderer. He lives in the realms of bliss, where no tyrant's power can reach, and he lives in his martyr's death before us, in the noble example of faithfulness unto death he has set us, and speaks to us the great word "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." And even a blood-guilty Herod Antipas can be an example as well as a lesson to us. We may not be highly exalted as he was, we may not be either a small or great potentate, and we may not, like him, have shed innocent blood, but we certainly may, like him, trample under foot the commandment of God and defy the laws of God and man. Let Herod's example be a warning to all who find pleasure in sin and wickedness. Let it warn us in good time to rid ourselves of the power of a particular sin to which we may have sold ourselves, that it may not effect

sooner or later our utter ruin. And Herod can teach us the important and salutary lesson not to trifle with the divine truth we hear proclaimed to us. We may highly respect the minister that preaches to us Christ's gospel, and even hear him gladly, but if the truth he sets forth is not sincerely and heartily accepted by faith, and allowed to influence and regulate our life and conduct towards God and man, this very truth will be our condemnation. Nothing can save us from the destructive power and tendency of sin but God's love and mercy in Christ Jesus, heartily accepted by faith in Him. And the faith that saves us will renew and sanctify us, and "make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

XI.

Paul in Athens.

I. CHRISTIANITY AND ART.

ACTS XVII. 16.

"Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry."

I.—It was owing to a fierce storm of persecution raised by a fanatical Jewish mob at Berea, that the apostle, in company with some Berean converts, made for Athens, perhaps much sooner than he had thought to do. It is not stated whether he made his journey thither by land or sea, most probably he chose the quicker and pleasanter route by sea, and must have arrived in Athens in three or four days. On his arrival there his travelling companions left him, returning to their homes again. Paul then has, on a sudden, been transferred to Athens, the very heart and centre of Greek culture, from which philosophy, science, art, and political wisdom spread to all nations, a most important event in the history of his apostolical mission. He had seen heathen cities before, had seen heathen life and activity, but nowhere could he have seen heathenism in all its seductive glory and captivating charms as here in Athens. The city was indeed irregularly built, and her streets were narrow, but her imposing public buildings, her splendid temples, her many life-breathing monuments and statues, and her important history and traditions, made her

beautiful, attractive and interesting. There was enough there for a cultivated mind to see and admire, to learn and enjoy, if one had only sufficient time and leisure to pay all due and necessary attentions to them. Paul was thus happily situated, for he had made up his mind to wait the arrival of his missionary companions before he would begin to deliver to the Athenians his message of salvation. He was, however, determined whilst thus waiting, to turn his attention to the many beautiful works of art in sculpture and architecture Athens contained. He was not such a narrow-minded, bigoted Jew as to have an aversion to behold, much less to investigate and study works of art, be they even images or statues representing heathen divinities; nor was he such a puritanical fanatic as to carry with him in heathen lands an axe, in order to demolish images called idols; he was not the iconoclast Jew Renan holds him to have been. [Paul, the Hebrew Christian and apostle of Christ, was well aware that his Master came not into the world to destroy, but that men might have life and that they might have it more abundantly. And this abundant life certainly includes the inventive and creative activity of man's genius and talent, whereby he contributes to the elevation and ennobling of his fellow-men's mind and character. Paul, the disciple of Christ, free from bigotry and fanaticism, loses no time in giving his attention to the works of architecture and sculpture, to the temples with their images and statues. Here, in Athens, the very heart of refined and intellectual heathenism, he is anxious ~~first~~ to see before he judges; ~~first~~ to learn before he

begins to teach; ~~first~~ to acquire all necessary information respecting the worship of the beautiful, before he attempts to expose the errors and fallacies connected with it. None in Athens could have surmised for what purpose this Jewish stranger was studying their works of art, their just pride and glory. Possibly his striking outward appearance may have called forth the Athenians' sarcasm on meeting him, and probably induced them to turn away from him in disgust, for beauty and symmetry in the human form and shape it was that usually could command the Athenians' attention and admiration. Undisturbedly did Paul pursue his observations at Athens, and if there was one place which must have arrested his steps more than another, it must have been that hill on which the celebrated Acropolis, or citadel, stood. "The spirit which rested over Athens was concentrated here. The platform of the Acropolis was a museum of art, of history, and religion. The whole was one composition of architecture and sculpture, dedicated to the national glory and to the worship of the gods." If Paul had only seen the magnificent Acropolis with its numerous statues, columns and halls; if he had only seen the Parthenon, the temple of Minerva, built under Pericles, that splendid building with the exquisitely beautiful statue of the goddess Pallas Athene or Minerva, a work of Phidias, twenty-five feet high, and made of gold and ivory; if he had only seen the Erechtheium, the oldest and most venerated temple, which contained the holy olive-tree, said to have grown out of the spear of Minerva; if he had only seen all that could be seen on and

around that square craggy rock about one hundred and fifty feet high, he must have been struck with awe and admiration at the sight of so much beauty, elegance and splendour. Paul has seen all this, and probably all that could be seen at Athens, and yet we hear not a word of admiration, not a word expressing his satisfaction, his joy and rejoicing ; but we do hear words of sadness and indignation. His spirit, it is said, was stirred in him, when he saw the city full of idols. We do not believe Renan when he says, that the prejudices of the iconoclast Jew had blinded him and made him insensible to all the beauty he saw, for had he allowed any Jewish prejudices to get the better of him, he would never have devoted so much time in looking upon the works of art with such care and attention, as the verb for seeing in the original (*θεωρεῖν*) justifies us in this our inference. Paul looked upon all the works of art, as a Christian and an apostle of Christ, from a religious point of view, and he was obliged to do so, for those works represented religious principles, and were in the service of religion. Looking upon all the images and statues from a religious point of view, we need not wonder that the spirit of Paul was stirred in him, when he saw the city full of idols.

II.—When we speak of Grecian art, we particularly and exclusively mean the plastic art, in which this highly gifted nation excelled so much as to deserve the highest praise and admiration of all cultivated people. The models of perfection they have left us in this art will ever serve as copies to aspiring artists. In the plastic the artist strives to realize an ideal he has conceived, and which is to find

a correct expression in the form and figure he creates, so that both are in perfect harmony with each other. When the artist succeeds in giving a correct and clear expression to his conceived ideal in the figure he forms, and this figure is distinguished by beauty and symmetry, then he has created a work of classical value. The artist's ideal will ever be the product of the opinions and principles he entertains, especially on the highest and deepest subject that can possibly engage the mind and heart of man, and this is the subject of religion. The Grecian artist's ideal arose from his religious belief, which was polytheism, in which the forces of nature were personified and deified. The human form was chosen for the gods, as it was considered the most beautiful, and the habitation of a thinking mind. Hence the Grecian statues represented the natural man in plastic-ideal conception, divinities in the human form, and what the body is to the mind and spirit of man, this the temples were to the statues or gods they contained, they were their habitations. There is no doubt that the origin of art lies in the spiritual freedom of man to raise himself above the realities of life, and bring them into connection with higher invisible powers, with ideals conceived. The strong presentiment pervading men of the existence of higher, invisible powers, to which they were endeavouring to raise and combine the natural ones, speaks clearly enough of the origin of art and its connection with religion. The fertile genius of the Greeks created a religion of art. Their prolific fancy, their brilliant imagination, and their fine taste for beauty, have produced

images and statues of incomparable elegance, and invented a most ingenious mythology. As, however, the natural man, not only with his idealistic aspirations and tendencies, but also his natural powers, impulses and longings, passions and lusts, were personified in human forms, deified and worshipped, we cannot wonder at the pernicious effect this must have had on the masses of the Greek people, who by no means looked upon them as mere symbols, but as such realities as the fantastic Renan takes them to have been, as true gods and goddesses. And among these lovely images representing some moral and religious ideas, there were images and statues enough representing immorality and sensuality, calculated to poison the minds of the worshippers and legalizing vice. Instead of true piety, a more or less crude superstition, a frivolous unbelief and scepticism prevailed among the mass of the Greek people, the result of the worship of the beautiful. There were, indeed, found among the Greeks many men of high moral character ; but the people, on the whole, showed among many bright, shining traits, many dark and deep shades in their character. Immorality and impurity stood in glaring contrast with the few virtues practised. Religious instruction in the temples and schools was entirely unknown in the ancient time, and also in Greece. Fixed only was the traditional worship, and each worshipper explained to himself as well as he could, the form of worship, and their ingenious mythology was contradictory and differently explained. The fancy and imagination of poets and artists were employed in promul-

gating dangerous errors, in perverting the mind of the people, and in making immorality and vice both attractive and excusable. Hence, Plato, in his ideal republic, banished all poems which were soft and enfeebling, all the statues which could suggest impure feelings. It was, therefore, the pernicious and soul-destroying effect Polytheism had on the people of Greece, that stirred the heart and soul of the great apostle in deep compassion and pity at the sight of the beautiful and seductive images he saw in Athens. So scrupulously superstitious, and yet so frivolous ; so many deified virtues, and at the same time so many repulsive vices authorized by religion ; so many gods and goddesses, and yet no knowledge of the living God who has created heaven and earth ; so light-hearted, careless, and pleasure-loving, and yet living in sin and iniquity, having no idea that they were sinning against God, and, consequently, knew no dread of the judgment to come. It was this pernicious effect idolatry had upon the people of Greece, and not the works of art, that stirred the apostle's spirit within him, when he saw the city full of idols.

III.—When art, the work of man's imagination, usurps the place of religion ; when statues and images, however ingenious their conception, and however beautiful their execution, are looked upon as representing gods and goddesses, and worshipped as such, as they undoubtedly were in Greece, then we need not be surprised to hear of the emotion of the apostle at such dangerous estrangement. In this his righteous indignation, he called these statues

and images what they in reality were, viz., idols ; and an idol is not only a vain thing, but a pernicious and soul-destroying thing. The artist's endeavour was, and is, to represent for man's contemplation things eternal in perishable forms, as his imagination suggests them to be ; whilst in true and vital religion, man comes into possession of things eternal, divine truths imparted by unerring reason, divine justice, and forgiving mercy. Whilst art engages only the imagination and fancy of man, and its object is to educate the taste and to cultivate the feelings of the man contemplating its works, true and vital religion, the religion of Christ, through the medium of faith, takes possession of all man's spiritual faculties and powers, bringing them in harmony with God and with themselves. True religion, the religion of Christ, teaches that God is a spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him not in material forms, however beautifully executed, not as conceived by the imagination of poets and artists, but in spirit and in truth, for the Father, Christ tells us, seeketh such to worship Him. Divine revealed truth alone is able to make man free from the degrading superstition of idolatry. True religion, the religion of Christ, demands of man to be reconciled with his Father in Heaven, united to Him by a living faith, so that in the union with Him man may be able to lead a godly and holy life, full of peace, joy, and hope. Christ's religion does not connive at sin and impurities, but demands of every man to be holy, and teaches that without holiness no man can see God. The cross is the condemnation of sin, but the salvation of the sinner. In religion,

divine truth alone is beautiful, however unattractive it may appear to us. Polytheism, however attractive its outward appearance may have been, worked man's destruction, for it is based on falsehood and error. Truth alone is abiding and eternal. The beautiful forms Greece has left us have been saved out of the wreck of their religion of art because true and in accordance with the principles of art. Be but one with God in Christ, and all will be yours, because the sun of divine truth will shine on your whole life and activity, sanctifying and blessing all your thoughts and feelings. God's love and mercy in Christ Jesus, accepted by faith, will fill the believing man's soul with peace, joy, and hope; it will regulate and control man's conscience, enabling him to do his manifold duties and obligations in life as in the sight of Him who seeth in secret; make him strong and courageous in all the vicissitudes of life, and at last grant him an eternal victory. Religion, the religion of Christ, alone can satisfy truly man's spiritual wants and aspirations. Art can and ought to be serviceable to religion, and can be a pleasant and useful companion to man, but it has no right to be man's master. I know there are sentimentalists, who would make us believe that the cultivation and contemplation of art enables them to dispense with religion and the churches where its principles are set forth and inculcated. In the theatre, they say, they see the follies and vices of men, not only in their absurdity, but also in their pernicious consequences; in picture-galleries and museums, they say, they see so much of man's creative genius, as to feel elevated at their study and contempla-

tion ; and in concerts, the music awakens in them a variety of pleasant feelings. Hence, art makes them dispense with religion and religious worship, as being superfluous and unnecessary. We are convinced that these sentimentalists labour under a great delusion, greater than that of the Greek people who worshipped the beautiful and had a religion of art. The Greeks did it out of ignorance, having not been enlightened by an express divine revelation on the errors of their ways, but professing Christians ought to be acquainted with the history of the worship of the beautiful in Greece and ought to be in possession of revealed truth ; hence, they are inexcusable. These sentimental people ought to know that art has not only no power to suppress sin and vice, but rather excites too often to the committal of both, when clothed in the witchery of form and colour ; art has no power to strengthen man's will against the seductive and captivating temptations he is constantly exposed to. The education of the taste, and the cultivation of the feelings in undue proportion, destroys the masculine tone of mind. Art much sooner contributes to effeminate man, and to procure for man refined, sinful enjoyments and pleasures. Ah, when we see these self-deluded sentimentalists, these professed worshippers of the beautiful, refusing to worship the living God in spirit and in truth ; refusing to love Him who first loved us and gave Himself for us ; refusing to take up the cross and follow Him, who is the perfect ideal of manhood ; then our spirits, too, are stirred within us at such dangerous delusion and estrangement. What can it profit such men

to turn their attention exclusively to the beautiful, whilst they wilfully neglect to behold that one dark and ugly spot in them called sin. One believing look up to the cross of Christ would make vanish that which keeps them constantly in bondage, and makes them miserable and wretched. O, that men would know Jesus, the spiritual King, in His divine beauty, in all His loveliness and attraction. When faith opens man's heart to the entrance of this King in all His beauty, in all His heavenly glory, our inward spiritual world will be renewed daily, so that we shall one day, when in the eternal abode, be like Him, the heavenly King, our Saviour. I say then to all of you, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols," and "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

XII.

Christ the Subduer of Storms.

MATT. XIV. 22-31.

"And straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come, He was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

I.—It is not my intention of offering to you an explanation of the miraculous deed performed by our Saviour of which our text speaks. It would be the height of folly and great presumption on my part, were I to attempt this. With things natural we may succeed in discovering the laws relating to them, and learn to know the connection between cause and effect. We know how much there is still to be found out in nature, although we gladly confess that very much has already been brought to light through man's unremitting exertion. We entertain the hope that naturalists will go on disclosing to us those secrets of nature still a puzzle to us, and many of which are known merely by their effects. Whether it ever will be profitable for man to unravel all the mysteries of nature, to find out all her operative causes, future generations will be better able to judge than we. In this remarkable century of ours as-

tonishing progress in the knowledge of natural science has been made, for which we have every reason to be thankful. The book of nature lies open before us to be read and understood, and to the honour of man be it said that he does not shun time and trouble in acquiring a clear knowledge of its marvellous contents. The book of Revelation, however, presents some problems to man, which he will never be able to solve, however learned or ingenious he may be. It is time misspent to endeavour to explain what is in its very nature inexplicable. A miracle, as such, is a supernatural act, above the known laws of nature, and consequently contrary to the ordinary experience of man. A miracle can, therefore, be denied as having been performed, and the denial comes usually from men who are more jealous for the prerogative of the laws of nature, than they are for the prerogative and honour of Him, who is their Creator and Upholder. He may, indeed, be the law-giver, but He is on no account to be tolerated to interfere with the working of these, His own laws, be the intention ever so wise and good. They would allow themselves the liberty of interfering with these laws, but the Creator Himself they would fain have slavishly tied to His own laws. To such men with such whimsical arguments a miracle is utterly impossible, and, in truth, beyond their comprehension. But we, who believe in God as a personal being, almighty, and all wise, ever living and ever active, we allow Him to have His own free will and the power of making known to man divine laws, which are to regulate his spiritual life. A miracle is an effect produced by God without the intervention

of a second cause, and to explain an especial act of God would be to interpose a second cause between His actions and Himself, the Cause of all causes. For God there are no miracles! God can also at any time, when willing, communicate to man divine truth by men chosen for this, His purpose. He may endow such chosen servants of His with especial power, in order to induce truth-loving men to give these messengers of His a ready and willing ear as to the truth they have to make known. We have still to learn that such a mode of procedure on the part of God, to make known to man His will and purpose, is unreasonable or derogatory to His Divine character. We, however, firmly believe that God has of old, at sundry times and by divers manners, spoken through such chosen, privileged men, and at last through Christ, His Son, and the record of it we have in the Bible. Miracles, then, have never been performed by Jehovah's servants merely to gratify man's morbid craving for supernatural displays, and for the purpose of strengthening and confirming man in his superstition and ignorance as to the working of the laws of nature. They were deemed necessary for the introduction of divine truth, on which man's spiritual well-being for time and eternity depends. Once such truth made known, the divine power inherent in it, aided by the working of God's Spirit, astonishing miracles are daily performed in the spiritual world within man, for our God is a God that doeth wonders. Believing, however, that the miracles recorded in the Bible have been performed, they convey to us as symbols spiritual truth, which the Church collectively, and the Christian

individually, need for instruction, comfort and consolation. Christ's walking on the Sea of Galilee, mysterious and inexplicable as the act is, and ever will remain, had, nevertheless, a deep symbolical meaning to His distressed apostles witnessing it, and will ever have the same to all Christ's faithful ones, anxious to know the spiritual laws by which their spiritual life collectively and individually is governed and sustained. It speaks to Christ's Church : " The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." And it speaks to the individual, believing Christian : " Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee ; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

II.—Life is a struggle : this is the daily experience of by far the greater part of mankind. Very few men can say at the end of their time, that their voyage on the ocean of life has passed in calm and quietude. If the truth were known, there would be, comparatively speaking, very few favoured ones who could say that they never had to battle against storms and tempests, more or less violent, and perhaps not few who may have suffered shipwreck. And what is said in this respect of the individual man, can with truth be said of nations, and of political, social, and ecclesiastical bodies. As regards the Church of Christ, we all know that already for many years a violent storm has been raging around it, threatening it with utter destruction. And individual Christians are again buffeted by the waves

of infidelity and in danger of being washed away. Do we not almost everywhere see confusion wrestling with confusion, error with error, selfishness with selfishness? Does not evil threaten us on every side? Does it not sometimes appear as if the powers of hell were let loose, inflaming men with an irreconcilable hatred and strife towards each other? All seems to be done if possible to uproot the Christian's belief in God and His Christ, and thus leave him without God and hope in the world. It is painful to say that this storm of infidelity has already not only uprooted many a Christian's faith, but has also shaken the faith of entire nations. It is a sad fact that the sun of Christian truth has almost entirely vanished from many nations still bearing the name of Christ and the dark night of modern heathenism has descended upon them. This storm of infidelity has, alas! not yet subsided, but is still more or less violent, and doing here and there much mischief. And we cannot wonder that many Christians look with anxiety to coming events, and are troubled regarding the future of Christianity thus violently attacked. Not a few of them, instead of resting on the promises of God and growing strong in faith and hope, allow themselves gradually to be shifted and drifted away from the Rock of Ages, and are in danger of arriving ultimately in an entirely opposite direction from that to which they once so cheerfully steered. The storm of infidelity and unbelief is indeed often even furious, and doing much damage; but have we as believing Christians really cause to be in fear, much less in despondency about it? We have, indeed, need to be on

our guard, to be watchful and prayerful, but dare we as believing Christians allow the gloomy thought even passingly to arise in us that it can be possible for divine truth to be swept away by the turbulent elements? If we stand firmly on the Rock that cannot be moved, our faith shall never fail. It behoves us ever to keep stedfastly in mind that Christ, our King and Master, is walking also on the stormy sea of our own time, and bids the waves be still. Let us bring to our remembrance the eventful night on the Sea of Galilee. Behold your Saviour walking on the sea. The moving waves bear His foot as if it stood on firm ground. The boisterous surges find Him to be their mighty ruler, who bids them to be still, and with a firm step He treads the waters, moving onward to the threatened ship wherein were His distressed disciples. He was the whole time near them, and had borne them on His loving heart. Although they had not seen Him He was yet very near to them, ready to help and console them. And as then, so now, and till the end of the world. On the troubled waves of our own time, Christ ever walks calmly and steadily as their Lord and Master. They may arise in revolt against Him, but they cannot overcome Him. They may sometimes hide Him from the sight of His followers, but they cannot hinder His walk. They must ultimately acknowledge that He is King, and obey His behest. As in morning dawn the night struggles with the day, the rays of the rising sun breaking more and more through the skies, proclaiming the coming light of day, so are the many religious awakenings in our

time, sure prophetic signs of the promised coming of the day of light, when the night will pass away, the storm subside, and the kingdom of peace be immovably established. Whilst we live in this morning dawn it, alas ! happens often enough to us of little faith, what happened to the frightened disciples on the stormy sea. In our excessive fear and anxiety we often do not, like them, recognize our beloved Saviour walking on the turbulent waves, in order to subdue and quiet them. We, like them, think it is an apparition ! “It is an apparition !” exclaimed the disheartened and frightened disciples. What a mistake to have taken the Saviour, who came to their rescue in the hour of need, for an apparition ! However painful it was to the Saviour to see His own disciples under such a delusion, He loses no time in reproaching them, for He was anxious that they should not only know Him but feel also His power. He was desirous that their faith in Him should be strengthened, and this He knew would cause fear to vanish. He therefore said to them assuringly : “Be of good cheer ; it is I ; be not afraid !” How reassuring is the sound of these words ! How comforting their import ! Yes, that is the sweet voice which speaks to us everywhere in the Gospels. “Fear not !” is the sound that re-echoes from beginning to end, quieting the timid and drawing them gently and kindly to Himself. “Be of good cheer ; it is I ; be not afraid !” Thus he ever speaks to His own beloved ones when they have to pass through the waters of tribulation, and thus His sweet encouragement imparts to them strength and consolation, enabling them to bear everything with patience and

longsuffering, looking forward with joyful hope to the coming of a brighter and happier day, the eternal day of rest.

III.—It is very important and instructive to know that it was not the Saviour with whom the proposal originated that Peter should walk on the sea. It was Peter himself who made the request to the Saviour to let him come to Him: "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee upon the waters." This, we say, is very instructive to know, for this confirms that which we know of the Saviour, *viz.*, that he would never ask of His people more than they really can do. He knew well that Peter at that time was utterly unable to accomplish such a heroic act of faith, for his faith was really very feeble. The request came from Peter, the man whose will outran his faith by far, the man who was too hasty and inconsiderate in what he undertook or vowed to do. He overrated the strength of his faith, and even dared to venture to walk on the stormy sea like his divine Master. Deeds of heroic faith cannot be imitated. Where there is strong faith there will also mighty deeds be accomplished; but where faith is weak or perhaps entirely wanted, the works of faith will be either insignificant or wanting altogether. It is true that Peter requested the Saviour in the words: "If it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee," and it was, therefore, in the power of Christ to refuse to comply with this his wish. The Saviour was indeed well aware of the weakness of his faith, but he was anxious that His daring and venturesome disciple should himself come to the clear consciousness of this fact. He wanted him to learn this salutary lesson from his own per-

sonal experience, and therefore bade him, "Come!" He treated this, His disciple of weak faith, as we treat our little ones when they begin to exercise themselves in walking. We let them come to us, especially if they are desirous to do so, but we all the while watch carefully their tottering footsteps, every movement they make, that we may be able to help them and thus prevent their coming to grief. "Come!" was the short and significant answer Peter got, and the man of strong impulse and rash resolution really made the attempt to walk on the rolling billows! Hardly was the perilous step attempted when a strong blast of wind came, which threw large waves over him and he felt in imminent danger of losing his life. Panic-stricken he cried aloud: "Lord, save me." What was undertaken in his own strength might have proved fatal but for the presence and timely interference of the Saviour, to whom the cry of distress was directed. Little faith will always prove insufficient to accomplish acts of heroic faith—this is the great and salutary lesson we derive from Peter's failure. Pious emotions, noble resolutions, imitating the good example of the great, that cannot of itself give us the ability and strength to walk on the turbulent waves of life. Faith, strong faith, is needed to carry on the battle of life with hope of ultimate success, for the man of strong faith will not look exclusively to the threatening powers of whatever nature and character they may be, but up to his Divine King and Lord who is able and willing to procure for him the victory. The Christian has constantly to examine himself, how he stands in regard to his faith; for

we are apt to overrate the strength of our faith. How often does it not happen that we think we are so strong in our faith that we can venture to rush with open eyes into the way of temptation, and how often do we not thus bring ourselves miserably to fall? But for the timely cry, "Lord save us!" how many would have fallen never to rise again? How often does it not happen that in quiet and prosperous days we flatter ourselves that our faith is so strong that we could bear all things with Christian resignation and fortitude, but when we have to pass through the waters of tribulation, perhaps always deeper and deeper, we turn cowards and are loud in pitiable lamentations. O, how often has the Saviour to utter the complaint against us in the words: "O, thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" And yet little faith is better than no faith at all, if we but, like Peter of little faith, honestly and sincerely keep to Christ our Saviour who is ever near us. The little faith of Peter, however, grew by God's grace in the course of time so strong that he, in reality and truth, became a hero of faith able bravely to face all storms and persecutions of life, and die on the battle-field crowned as a martyr. If we have not faith strong enough to carry on in Christ's name great and heroic acts of faith successfully for the Master's cause, may that smaller measure of faith never be wanting us which will prompt us in our trials and perplexities to trust our Saviour and seek help and support from Him. Let us pray that He may rescue us without stain on our enlightened Christian conscience, out of the entanglement into which we may have thrown ourselves,

and that He may not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear, but make a way for our escape and deliver our soul from death, our eyes from tears, and our feet from falling.

XIII.

Gamaliel's Advice.

ACTS v. 38.

"And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought."

I.—The first persecutions the apostles suffered on account of preaching the Gospel would be of sufficient interest to us were we to make it a subject of consideration. We are naturally interested in knowing how these same men, who, during the lifetime of their Master, failed openly to declare their adherence to Him and His cause, would act in this respect now He is removed from them. This legitimate curiosity meets with such information on the subject as is not only satisfactory to us, but highly honourable to them. We learn to know that a complete change for the better had taken place with these apostles since the day of Pentecost. Since that time they have become faithful and courageous witnesses to the saving knowledge of Christ, and because they were such, they had to suffer persecution and were brought before the highest ecclesiastical court on the charge of heresy. An awful charge before such a tribunal, by whom their own Master was sentenced to death! The law regarding such an offence against the majesty of God was cruel, and Jewish judges clinging to the letter of the law, could wash their hands as being innocent of the blood of the heretic. In passing the

sentence of death on heretics they thought of doing nothing more than the law prescribed, a plea of justification the Christian zealots could not advance, who, for centuries, have shed more innocent blood than their Jewish predecessors have done. The apostles had already been brought before Annas and Caiaphas of unenviable notoriety, on the charge of heresy, but, owing to the fear of exciting the people against them, they were dismissed with the strict injunction that "they speak henceforth to no man in this name," meaning Christ. It was utterly impossible for these apostles to give heed to this admonition, for in doing so they would have been unfaithful to their divine commission, and would have thus done violence to their sincere and heartfelt conviction. And this they had the courage to state to their judges, utterly unmindful of the consequences accruing to them and the cause dear to their hearts. Peter and John answered and said unto them: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye, for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard." As the apostles could not act as their Jewish judges commanded them to do, and as these judges would not desist from persecuting them, both must sooner or later meet again. And they met soon enough, but, fortunately for the apostles, this time there was among the Jewish judges a councillor who persuaded them to exercise moderation towards them, and this man was none other than Paul's Jewish teacher, Gamaliel. The teacher was not, like his pupil Saul, breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.

Had he been such he might have consented to have the apostles put to death, as all who constituted the judicial tribunal were inclined to do. This Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, held in honour of all the people, had probably as much zeal for his pharisaical religion as his pupil Saul, but it was tempered by wisdom and restrained by experience. He was well aware that persecution is not the best and most effectual means to exterminate new opinions entertained and advanced, for, when men are made to suffer for the same, they acquire a value and importance in their estimation which they may not be worthy of. The fire of enthusiasm for the new and strange doctrines entertained by the apostles, would sooner or later die out if it was not kindled from above, but if it has its origin from above it cannot be successfully extinguished. History and common-sense had taught this salutary lesson to the wise sanhedrist, hence he advised the judges not to allow extreme measures to be used against the apostles. Let us, however, not entertain the wrong notions, as some of the Fathers of the Church have done, that the learned Rabbi had any secret leaning towards Christianity; that he had not. None was more anxious than Gamaliel to see this new heresy vanish away, mysteriously as it had made its appearance, but he wisely thought that persecution would on no account accomplish this desired effect. He, however, entertained the conviction that a higher power would overthrow it if his co-religionists would only daily pray for this. Hence he inspired a Rabbi Samuel, the Little, to compose such a prayer, which is still to be found in the Jewish prayer book,

and begins : " Let there be no hope to them that apostatize from the true religion, and let heretics, how many so ever they may be, all perish as in a moment, etc." Gamaliel chose this mode of procedure against the sect of Nazarenes, and he felt sure that God would hear the prayers of His faithful. In the course of time, he thought, the new doctrines of the Christian religion would hardly be heard of. Besides this, he looked with pharisaical pride and scorn on these illiterate Galilean fishermen, who seemed to him not the men capable to promote, with anything like success, the new religion. Whatever his motives may have been in counselling moderation, he saved the apostles' lives and deserves our gratitude. " Refrain " he said, to the council, " from these men and let them alone, for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown, but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them, lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God."

II.—We can do nothing against God, nothing against anything emanating from Him, and we should be guilty, not only of great folly, but of a great crime, were we to attempt to do such. This is the plain meaning of the advice offered by Gamaliel to the judicial tribunal, and we think every reasonable and liberal-minded man will approve of it, provided he believes in God as the supreme Governor of the universe. Nations and individuals professing, not only to believe in God, but also that they were in duty bound to obey Him in all things, have, nevertheless, often enough been, and are still, fighting against God and hindering His work among men. The pious of all nations have ever

strenuously adhered to the principle advocated by the doctor of the law, and yet no principle has been more violated in practice than this. They were, indeed, fully conscious that they could, strictly speaking, do nothing against God, and would, therefore, on no account consciously hinder a work of His; but, unfortunately, they considered themselves competent to judge what was a work of God, and in their anxiety to uphold the truth they believed to have proceeded from Him, they thought themselves, if not authorized, certainly justified in silencing the opposers of the same, or those setting forth new doctrines. They thought in doing such they were doing God a service and promoting His cause. Men have not erred out of ignorance as to the truth of the principle to which Gamaliel pleaded, but they have erred, and do so repeatedly and constantly, in their estimation as to what really constitutes a work of God, and has His approval and sanction. And this error, through which great crimes have been committed, can easily be discovered. We see truth and error in constant warfare with each other, and during the time this struggle is going on, error and falsehood may hold their sway over the masses of the people yea, even pernicious and soul-destroying opinions may maintain their influence through ages. Whilst this is the case it is certainly difficult and perplexing to know what is really the truth, what is really emanating from God, what is in very deed a plant He had planted. "How are we to act," exclaims in bewilderment the Conservative, "when we see old and venerated opinions, creeds, customs, and manners attacked and supplanted by new ones?"

Some, in their uncontrollable zeal and hatred against everything new, may, like the majority of the Jewish sanhedrists, counsel to slay the setter-forth of new or strange doctrines. And there was a time when, alas ! such extreme measures were resorted to even by those who professed to be most orthodox Christians. But the wise Rabbi, pleading toleration for the apostles accused of heresy, puts to shame such fanatics, who profess the religion of love. He said to their judges : " Refrain from these men and let them alone, for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown ; but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them, lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God." Annas and Caiaphas condemned Christ to death, and in doing this they thought they had once for all got rid of Christ and His doctrine. And these men would have done the same to the apostles, the propagators of His doctrines, but for the timely interference of Gamaliel. These high priests had learned nothing from experience, and were ready to commit not only a similar crime, but a similar folly. The apostles, preaching Christ, even the Christ crucified and risen, might have taught them, if they were capable of learning anything, the utter folly and uselessness of such extreme measures against personal conviction. They had, however, learned nothing from experience ; but Gamaliel, citing some examples from Jewish history in justification of his principles, was a man who knew how to derive profit from experience. He, indeed, did not believe that Christ was sent by God, nor that Christianity was a divine work, but he rightly believed that truth only was abiding, whilst error

and falsehood, however enchanting and captivating, must sooner or later be found out and discarded. Man may mistake error and falsehood for truth, but when once detected as such, it is down with them. And this holds good not only of religious truth, but of all other truth. We continually discover and discard errors and mistakes in science, but truths, as such verified, remain fast, however old they may be. Gamaliel would have been startled had he witnessed the verification of his principle in the spread and duration of that very Christianity he treated with such unpardonable indifference. Nearly two thousand years have elapsed since he uttered his opinion, during which time the religion of Christ had to face many an Annas and Caiaphas who were fighting against it, but in spite of them all it is as powerful and life-giving now as it ever has been, and ever will be, until the end of time, because it is of God, the whole counsel of God towards mankind, a work of His. "Every plant which My heavenly Father hath not planted," says Christ, "shall be rooted up."

III.—We can do nothing against God, nothing against a counsel or work of His, was Gamaliel's opinion. But how are we to know what is a work of God or not? Gamaliel tells us that a work of God will and must be successful in the end, whilst any work not being His, will and must, sooner or later, meet with the fate it deserves. This is true as far as it goes, but unfortunately it does not go far enough. We would ask this learned Rabbi, and all like-minded, whether we should wait till a work of God meets

with success before we make up our mind to take an interest in it, and help to promote it? Are we to wait until God's counsel as regards man's spiritual well-being is acknowledged and acted upon by multitudes, before we ourselves deem it our duty to do the same? If so, then we might have to wait long enough, and during this waiting-time, we should remain in utter ignorance respecting God's counsel, and consequently live and act contrary to His will. A counsel or work of God is not meant to be experimentalized with in the manner Gamaliel suggested, but for immediate understanding and acceptance. Besides this, it is an undisputed fact that religious truth, however clear and forcible, however necessary and obligatory, has often for centuries to struggle with error and falsehood, and not rarely with its perversion, before it is recognised and accepted in its divine simplicity and purity. And are erring and dying men to wait and see truth first triumphing before it is accepted and allowed to influence our life? Is, then, man utterly incapable of distinguishing between truth and error, between light and darkness? We believe every man, even the most ignorant and degraded, capable of doing this, if so inclined, and we believe also that it is man's imperative duty, when God is speaking to him, to act like the pious child Samuel and say: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." Gamaliel, the learned Pharisee, was of an entirely different opinion respecting this. He wanted to see divine truth first successful, before he would feel obliged to pay all due attention to it. In the meantime he would on no account

listen to the words of eternal life God was speaking through Christ, the Son, nor did he feel the least inclination to investigate the claims of that Christianity the apostles preached. In his estimation it was not worth a serious thought, preached as it was by illiterate Galilean fishermen. We should have thought that it was the most serious subject which could engage the attention of any man, especially of a Gamaliel, councillor of the highest ecclesiastical court. But he was too much of a Pharisee, too proud and self-sufficient, to think that any good thing can come out of Nazareth. And thus he remained as he was, a Pharisee. Whether he would have embraced Christianity had he seen it really successful, may be reasonably doubted, for such cool and calculating natures will always find some plea for not being disturbed in their indifference. There is, humanly speaking, more hope for a passionate, thorough-going zealot, that he will be won for Christ, than such speculating Gamaliels with their worldly wisdom. Rather a fanatical Saul, who is thoroughly in earnest regarding his own convictions, than such a Gamaliel, who speculates about divine truths on which his own salvation depends. Saul, the persecutor, made his way to Damascus, but Gamaliel, the indifferent, remained where he was. Saul, the fanatical pupil, became the greatest apostle of Christ, whilst Gamaliel, the teacher of great renown, helped to consolidate that system of Pharisaism, which is in antagonism to the gospel. We want men to be thoroughly in earnest for God's counsel towards man, as regards their own soul's welfare, and then they would with

Paul when brought face to face with Christ, anxiously ask, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" It is not enough not to hinder the counsel or work of the Lord in reference to ourselves and others, but it is also our duty and privilege to promote it to the best of our knowledge and ability. Divine truth is revealed to man with the distinctly declared purpose, not only spiritually to benefit him individually, but the man thus benefited has to advance this truth and be a fellow-worker with God. Gamaliel's speculation respecting Christ and Christianity, if ever seriously made, we know to have turned out to his own greatest disadvantage, whilst the apostles' firm faith in both won for them an imperishable crown of glory. Gamaliel was, at the best, satisfied that he could do nothing against God, whilst Peter and John, fully convinced of this, went further and declared, "We must *obey* God rather than man." The truth that saved them and was precious to their own soul they, in spite of persecution and suffering, rejoiced to make known to men as needful of the same as they were. God works through human agency; this, the proud, pharisaical teacher forgot to remember, when brought face to face with the humble messengers of the gospel. If all men were as cold and indifferent, as speculating and calculating, as this doctor of the law, God's message of redeeming love and mercy, in and through Christ, the Saviour, would never have been propagated, and, consequently, would never have cheered and comforted sinful, anxious souls; Christianity would have been nipped in the bud, whilst heathenism would have

remained driving inquiring, anxious souls to despair. We can, indeed, do nothing against God, but in giving heed to God's counsel we can promote His work, and do all for Him and with Him.

XIV.

Faithfulness in Little Things.

LUKE XVI. 10.

¹⁰ *He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much : and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."*

I.—Our text stands in connection with the parable of the unjust steward, and embodies a very important principle derived from the action of that steward. This unprincipled, worldly wise servant was suspected by his master that he had been spending his money as fast as he could purloin it, and was requested to make good his accounts, accompanied with the threat of losing his post. Such a request accompanied with such a threat, this faithless servant had not expected, and very naturally, it filled him with fear and dismay. He should have been prepared for this, as any thief must be for discovery and punishment, but he may have practised his thievery so long that he had lost all feelings and opinions about it. And now suddenly he is not only summoned to give an account of his stewardship, but threatened with instant dismissal. Not a spark of remorse is visible in him respecting his thievish actions, his pilfering ; his only fear is of losing such a comfortable berth. Being accustomed to live extravagantly at his master's expense, he trembled at the idea of being dismissed and exposed to the dangers of starvation, for hard work he could not do, and to beg, his pride would not allow him. In his perplexity he hit on a

stratagem, and shrewd and cunning as it was, it was but a roguish trick, quite in keeping with his whole faithless character. Without loss of time he called his master's debtors together and lowered their bills, to agree with the entries he had made in his master's book. By so doing he had the audacity to face his master, and in case he should fail to appease his anger, he might in his straits rely on the gratitude of the benefited debtors. This was a clever trick, and strange to say, he succeeded with it, for his master we are told, commended the unjust steward, because he had acted prudently, and not, as the A.V. renders it, wisely. He did not mind having been cheated by his dishonest servant, for as a true worldling, he rather found in that servant's worldly prudence, as exercised in squaring the accounts, more than a compensation. He does not commend his servant's dishonesty, but his *prudence*, for he may have thought, such a shrewd and cunning man I can use with great advantage in his position. He is indeed a thief, but from this time I shall take good care not to allow him to defraud me any more. And so he may remain. The Saviour, in describing the steward's act, condemns it as being unjust, but in doing so He impresses His disciples with the fact, that the children of this world are in their generation not more *wise*, but more *prudent* than the children of light. The children of this world, like this unjust steward, find out correctly the unjust means by which they can succeed in gaining their unjust ends, and all is done with alacrity and perseverance worthy of a true and honest cause. He meant to tell all His followers that if they, the children of

light and truth, would be prudent enough always to find out the right means to gain a right and just end, and this without much loss of time, they would accomplish greater things, and be more useful in their day and generation, than if they were imprudent and dilatory. Even the usually unrighteous Mammon, which, in the hand of the worldling, works unrighteousness, as in the case of the unjust steward who, by lowering the debt of his master's debtors, made them accomplices to his thievish transaction, might, in the hands of the children of light, be an incalculable blessing to many in benefiting them temporally and spiritually. Christ, then, requires, in this parable, of His disciples, that they should be prudent men and women, and intimates clearly enough that they could learn many salutary lessons respecting it even from unscrupulous, worldly men, who, in all they do, are more or less actuated by selfish, sordid motives. His children, the children of light, ought to be prudent—as He in another place says—like serpents and yet harmless as doves. In their prudence they should be influenced to act by right and pure motives, as not only to do none any injustice or harm, but all the possible good that lies in their power. They are to be faithful in that which is the least, in that which they consider the least in comparison to the greatest object of their life, for only when they are thus faithful will they also be faithful in that which is much; that which is so, or esteemed to be so. His words are: “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.”

II.—Our text speaks of small and great things. Looking

around and above us in nature we can classify all existing things, animate and inanimate, as regards their bulk and size, in great and small. Large objects, too far distant for the naked eye to reach, are brought nigh to us by the assistance of a telescope, and small objects, too small to be seen unassisted, are revealed to us by a microscope. Both the telescope and the microscope reveal to us objects of astounding greatness and littleness—all wonders of God's wisdom and power. The worlds the telescope discloses to the astronomer almost tempt us to think little of our planet, this good earth we inhabit; whilst the microscope in the hand of the naturalist brings to his notice the greatness and importance, in the household of nature, of the smallest beings, living and active. The astronomer espies more worlds than ours, many of them much larger, as, for instance, the planet Jupiter, which is about 92,000 miles in diameter, thus being nine or ten times larger than the planet we inhabit. The naturalist again tells us of creatures which are so small that, under a microscope enlarging four thousand times, they appear like points or commas in print, and these very small and insignificant creatures are everywhere to be found, and man's weal or woe, yea, his life and death may depend upon their activity. Decomposition and putrefaction, fermentation and corruption, that is their work. A very eminent naturalist, to whom we owe our information on this subject, distinctly asserts: "Not death, as it is ordinarily believed, produces putrefaction, but the life of these invisible creatures." The more natural science is pursued and advanced the more we are

justified in our opinion that in God's wonderful creation the little and great have all important and necessary functions to fulfil, and both are necessary. If we turn our attention to man, as the lord of creation, and notice his life and activity, we again use the term great and small, but in an entirely different sense than when speaking of either animate or inanimate things in nature. As regards the latter, we speak of laws and forces, and of the brute creation as acting by instinct ; but we have a far higher standard of measurement for man's action, and this for the simple reason that he is a moral being and responsible for his actions, yea, even for the deeds that ought to have been done and left undone. The law that prompts and regulates man's actions we call duty and obligations, and in the code of morality there is, strictly speaking, no paragraph for small or great at all. All man's duties place him under the obligation to act or not to act, and the number of these duties will depend upon the individual man's talent and capacity, capability and opportunity for actions, "for to whom much is given much is required." Those who have been able to accomplish great and useful deeds in their day and generation, and who being dead, yet speak to posterity by the works and example they have left behind them, have been men of genius and talents, men of science and knowledge, men of great enterprise and undaunted spirit, men of keen intellect and penetrating mind, men of large hearts and tender conscience, and, being thus favoured by Providence, their duties and obligations were more extensive than those of ordinary men in their ordinary walk of life. Providence

is, however, very sparing with these her favoured children, raised for a particular kind of work, and by far the largest majority of men have to be contented with a humbler measure of endowment, and as little is given little is required. If these less favoured children of men in their humble and narrow sphere of life do their respective duties faithfully, they will thereby merit the approval of the same Judge, before whom the great and mighty of this world meet their approval if found equally faithful. Enough, there is not a man living, however poor and insignificant a being he may be in society, who has not duties imposed upon him which demand of him imperatively to be attended to, and if they are faithfully discharged he is a true man. All man's actions, however great or small their influence may be, are judged by the highest and the infallible authority as to their being right or wrong. And as man is a responsible agent, and to Him who looketh deeper than man does, the motive and principles of actions constitute, in the sight of God, their intrinsic value. Large or small, therefore, are not words for the vocabulary "of conscience." "He that is faithful in that which is least," says Christ, "is faithful also in much."

III.—Christ requires of all who want to be His disciples and as such gain eternal life, that they should be as faithful in little matters as in great. He designedly puts the little first, for He knew well how hard it was for man generally to be faithful in little things. He had a thorough knowledge of the character and disposition of men, and was a keen observer of their actions. How well He learned to

know the character of the Pharisees, these blind guides, who strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel. With all their great doing they were but little-minded men, utterly incompetent to aspire to great and noble things, and to understand Christ and His divine mission. Alas! such little-minded men, who act thus like the Pharisees of old, and have no conception of the high and great object of Christ's mission among men, are numerous enough, even among professing Christians. These small-minded Christians, these dogmatic hair-splitters, disquiet themselves about a multitude of microscopic observances, and are a source of continued trouble and worry to others. Christ, who so vigorously exposed the little minds of the Pharisees, our little-minded Christian predecessors, could not possibly have meant *them* to be faithful in *their* littleness. When He speaks of faithfulness in small matters He condescends to our mode of speech. A thing or an act may, by comparison with others, be small or great according to the extent of its influence and usefulness, but in itself it may be right, good and necessary. When Christ inculcates faithfulness in that which is least, He can only mean faithfulness in such things we, by comparison, call small or insignificant, and yet may and often have great consequences to us or others. He no doubt meant to impress us with the idea that in all things relating to our duties and obligations as men and Christians, however small they may appear to us, we ought to be always faithfully discharging them. Beware, He admonishes us, of being faithless regarding what *you* may call little duties. The man who, in the round of

common duties, in the fulfilment of an ordinary, humble routine of life, is so unscrupulous and faithless as to be guilty of little dishonesties, little negligences, little unpunctualities, little shiftings and shufflings, little unkindnesses and tyrannies, little selfishnesses and covetousnesses, and similar little sins and transgressions, will, by repeated exercise in them, get so accustomed to them and become such an expert in them that he may one day astonish the world by their magnitude and baseness. Little sins and failings, little temptations and transgressions, ought faithfully to be battled against and overcome victoriously; but every time we allow these apparently little enemies to get the better of us they will increase in power, and will ultimately reign over us. On the other hand, if we are faithful in the discharge of these seemingly little duties, the habit of doing them will so increase in power and strength that we shall be able to bring the greatest sacrifice duty may require of us. It is not only on the battle-field that man can gain a glorious victory, but the humblest man, in his ordinary duties of life, can gain one victory after another and become a true hero if he fights valiantly on the side of sacred duty and maintains his allegiance to it. If we are faithful to our moral duties of life we shall be faithful to our religious duties; if we are faithful and true to God and His Christ we shall be faithful and true also to ourselves and our fellow-men. If we, however, are faithless in that which is least, to our ordinary duties of life, we shall also prove faithless as to our religious duties, and if faithless towards God and His Christ we shall also be faithless towards our

best and highest interests and to those of our neighbour. There are men and women, well-meaning Christians, who labour under the delusion that they must direct their attention exclusively to what they consider the higher religious duties, and whilst doing so the man neglects his business and the wife her domestic duties. They aim at being a great, shining light in the Church, and yet, by this, their great inconsistency, they become a stumbling-block and a rock of offence to many. We cannot all be preachers, missionaries and evangelists, deaconesses and matrons ; we cannot all devote our time exclusively to the propagation of the Christian religion, but we can, nevertheless, by being faithful and true to the trust committed to us, live a consistent, Christian life. Be where duty calls you and you will be in the right place ; act strictly and conscientiously, in accordance with the dictates of your enlightened Christian conscience wherever you are, and you will rightly fulfil the mission God has assigned to you ; fight valiantly against little temptations, sins, and uncharitablenesses, and in gaining, by God's grace, a victory over them you will be a true Christian hero. Wherever you are, whatever your position may be, be true to God and man, live and act as becometh a true Christian. Christ wants faithful men and women who can be trusted in all their manifold duties and engagements of life, and only such He will receive and own as His disciples, only for such has He great and glorious things in store—"things eye hath never seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man to conceive." Our whole life, however humble it may be, is to be

a preparation for the life to come, for the glory that awaits us, and only by faith in God's redeeming love, faithfully maintained in the battles and conflicts, under the leadership of the Captain of our salvation, to the end, shall we gain an eternal victory and receive a crown of glory. Remaining faithful to God and Christ to the end of our life we shall, when breathing our last, hear the voice of the Lord summoning us in the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

XV.

The Widow's Mite; or, Christian Charity.

MARK XII. 41-44.

"And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And He called unto Him His disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."

I.—Among the various kinds of suffering Christ had to endure during the few years of His public ministry, we may reckon those most painful to Him, which were inflicted upon Him by an evil disposed spirit of antagonism to all He had to state and teach respecting Himself and His mission. Rarely He met with those in authority and in the odour of learning or sanctity, who were willing to give the new teacher a fair hearing concerning what He had to say. They came to Him mostly with strong prejudices against Him and His claims, and hence they invariably directed to Him insidious questions with the intention to entrap Him into the snares laid for Him. Fancy Christ, the holy and just, standing before such maliciously disposed persons and listening to their cunningly devised questions with the base, hidden intention of effecting His speedy ruin! What must His feelings have been in the presence of such moral corruption and degradation! We are sure they must have been feelings of utter disgust and holy indignation. He could have refused to have anything to do with such

perverted and corrupted individuals, and had He done so none could have blamed Him. But Christ acted otherwise. He listened to all questions put to Him, and answered them in such a calm and dignified manner, as though He never suspected them of harbouring any sinister design, and as if they were the most honest and truth-loving men in the whole of Palestine. He was fully persuaded that truth was only meant for the truthful; but He was equally sure that truth brought before the untruthful would inflict upon them the punishment due to them. When Christ was, for the last time, in the temple, there came to Him Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, and Scribes, all putting to Him perplexing questions, in order to elicit from Him some answer which they might pervert and use against Him; but Christ, knowing their iniquitous design, nevertheless answered them. But, at the same time, He exposed, in unvarnished language, their hypocrisy, malice, and rapacity, which could not remain unpunished. It was no pleasant task to Christ to be obliged to unmask and expose so much of moral corruption and degradation as He discovered in these men. It must also have been exceedingly painful to have to do it in the precinct of the temple, His Father's house, and knowing that this was His last visit. He was, therefore, reluctant to leave this hallowed spot re-echoing with His words of rebuke and condemnation that He felt obliged to utter. He was unwilling to believe that the vineyard His Father had planted with so much love and care, should have brought forth nothing but wild grapes. He could not leave His Father's house with the painful

thought that the religion of Moses and the Prophets had produced nothing but Pharisees and Sadducees, men clinging to the mere letter of the Word, and men who set themselves above the letter and the spirit of the law and the prophets. He was loath to believe that the Jewish religion had brought forth nothing but men who hated divine truth, practised hypocrisy, oppressed and wronged widows and orphans, and found pleasure in putting insidious questions to Him whom they were in duty bound to reverence and obey. He was, however, convinced that those who managed the people's affairs, and should have influenced them for good, were blind leaders of the blind, whited sepulchres full of corruption, misleading and corrupting others. He had no doubt that those who obtruded themselves upon Him, with the intention of hindering His Messianic work, were mostly moved by anything but the sincere desire of promoting the spiritual well-being of the people. Has, then, the religion of Moses and the Prophets completely failed in accomplishing that for which it was given? Among that highly-favoured and privileged nation are none to be found but such busy-bodies, such loud and noisy talkers, such men of false zeal and impure motives, as engaged Him in discussion in the temple? Are there no worshippers in this magnificent temple, who worship their Father in heaven with a truly pious and devoted heart, and testify by their life and actions that they have work as well as faith, and that their religion is a reality and not a sham or mixed up with too much of selfishness? Christ, in the hope that He would find such true worshippers, of genuine piety, after having

put to silence His adversaries, rested a while in the court of the women, on a bench opposite the boxes wherein contributions were put for the maintenance of the temple. Many rich people put in much ; but a poor widow put in all she possessed, and this was two pieces of the smallest money in currency then, and amounting to about a farthing in our money. Christ then had looked upon the worshippers' hands as well as heart, and it cheered His loving heart to find that the poor widow's hand was carrying out the sincere desire of her heart. "And He called unto Him His disciples, and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, this poor widow cast in more than all they which are casting into the treasury ; for they all did cast in of their superfluity, but she of her want did cast in all she had, even all her living."

II.—The widow's two mites, put into one of the boxes for the support of the temple, gave our Saviour an occasion to let His people know on what principle and in what disposition deeds of charity should be done. The poor woman might not have given at all, for she seemed to have been too poor to give, since all she had *she* wanted for her own support. She might have given only one of the pieces of money she possessed, and kept the other for her own use. Had she done so, she would even then have acted nobly. She, however, gave all she possessed, all that was necessary for her living, and thereby evinced not only her keen sense of duty towards the place she worshipped in, but also her firm trust in the God she worshipped. She did not reason that these two small pieces of money she had to give were

of very little use in the enormous expenses that had to be made for the maintenance of the temple. She did not argue that there were so many rich and wealthy people worshipping who could, even out of their superfluity, defray all the expenses of the temple. "I should be robbing myself and depriving myself of the necessities of life were I to give even one of the two coins." She did not hesitate a moment in giving all she had, when she saw the rich really putting in large sums into the boxes put up for the purpose of receiving the people's contributions. She did not trouble herself about others, not even whether the money she was giving would be rightly used or not, but was mindful of her own duty. This her keen sense of duty prompted her to give all she had, and she gave it willingly and, as we have every reason to believe, also cheerfully. She wrought indeed a great sacrifice in doing this, the greatest she was able to bring, and it was this complete noble self-forgetfulness in which it was made that met the approval of Him who looketh on the hand as well as on the heart, on the work as well as on the faith of man. And in the joy of His heart at the sight of such self-denial He drew His disciples' attention to the intrinsic value of this apparently insignificant contribution, when brought into comparison with the gifts of the rich, because what was lacking in their gifts was found in hers. She brought really a sacrifice that cost her all the self-denial she was capable of, whilst in their offerings this virtue, which alone gives value to a charitable act, was wanting. Christ, while approving and commending the self-denying act, was by no

means desirous that His disciples should slavishly imitate her act, and give like her all they possess, to the support of religion, and thus leave themselves beggars, fit inmates of a workhouse. But what He really demanded from them was that they and all that are His, should, like the woman, practise the Christian virtue of self-denial and give to religious and charitable purposes, not merely as the rich in the temple did, out of their superfluity, but out of their wants. Christ deduced from the noble example of the poor widow's act of faith, the principle of self-denial, which makes every act of charity a sacrifice and as such acceptable in God's sight. The rich may give out of their superfluity, and in doing this, they really only part with that which they do not want, and cannot possibly miss. Such giving cannot be called a sacrifice, as it requires no self-denial on the part of the giver, except he is a miser and it is wrung from his heart, and then it cannot deserve to be called a charitable act at all. Let the rich, however, practise the Christian virtue of self-denial, and this in the cause of religion and humanity, let him deny himself some joys and pleasures, some comforts and luxuries, which he can indulge in legitimately, if so disposed, and then would his gifts really be a sacrifice such as Christ approves of and inculcates. He would then not give out of his superfluity, but out of *his* wants. David scorned to offer an offering which cost him nothing, and nobly declared: "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing." No religion without sacrifice, and the Christian religion has for its fundamental basis the self-sacrifice of Christ for the

redemption of mankind. Hence no Christian or Christ-like life is possible without the constant practice of self-denial, and self-forgetfulness in the cause of religion and humanity. The Christian more than any other man ought to be fully aware that he dare not lead a selfish life, and that he dare not make the unpardonable excuse, that he can do what he likes with all he possesses. He, of all men, ought to be fully conscious that all he is and all that he possesses, belong of right to God who created and redeemed him. He knows full well that all he can call his own he holds not as a possessor, but as a steward from whom it is required that he should be found faithful. The Christian is well informed of the fact that he cannot enrich God, for He needs nothing of us, as all is already His. He only requires of us that we should love Him as our Father, and should, in our acts and doings, exemplify Him, of whom it is said that He was going about doing good. This Christ's constant and habitual going about and doing good, was manifested in a life of self-denial and self-sacrifice, which is the salvation of the world. And a self-denying life for the good of others is the Christian's offering of thanksgiving to God for the great love where-with He has loved us, and acceptable to Him. The widow's mite was a sacrifice she made, whilst the offerings of the rich were not, for, says Christ, "All did cast in of their superfluity, but she of her want did cast in all she had, even all her living."

III. The poor widow's self-denying act for the support of the Jewish temple, has survived the temple with its

officiating priests and Levites. The principle underlying it was not only acknowledged by Christ as being requisite and necessary to give every act of charity its real value and importance, but He has also by His own self-sacrificing life for the redemption of mankind, imparted to this principle a new and powerful impulse, which it had not before. And with this new motive power, the strongest man could have, for self-denying acts of charity, He has also extended the sphere of such actions wider than it ever was, in fact as wide as the universe, and thus including all men without distinction. The temple He has reared, and of which He is the chief corner-stone, is not, like the Jewish, local, or national, or temporary, but is of world-wide extension, cosmopolitan and ever-enduring. And this His temple is not merely the temple for religious worship, but also the temple of humanity, for Christianity does not separate religion from morality, the divine from the purely human. Self-denying and self-sacrificing love has reared this magnificent temple of universal brotherhood, and self-denying, self-sacrificing love is also the officiating high priest administering to the wants and comforts of these redeemed brothers, of a common Father in heaven, and united to each other by a living faith in Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. And this, Christ's temple, is none other than His Church universal, visible in each church in particular in as far as she reflects the image of the Only Begotten of the Father, breathes His Spirit, and manifests His zeal and devotion to the cause of true religion and genuine humanity. Every worshipper in this Christ's temple feels himself in duty

bound to contribute to its support and extension, not merely out of his superfluity, but so much as stands in just proportion to his means. I have used the word "duty," which, after all, is not a right designation for the Christian's motive in contributing to the support of religion and the requirements of humanity. All the Christian's actions ought to be done from love to God, from a sincere desire to please Him, with the intention of doing His will, and being thus, in fact, a thank-offering to the great love and mercy He has bestowed on him in Christ Jesus. This, His love towards us, should awaken in us sincere love and devotion towards Him and all His children. Faith and love towards God should be the mainspring and cause of all our actions. "Whatsoever is not of faith," says Paul, "is sin"; and the same apostle also says, "that if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burnt, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing." Faith and love in the Christian worshipper will prompt him to contribute to the support of religion and the alleviation of the wants and miseries of his fellow-men. The self-sacrificing love of Christ, to which he owes his salvation, will induce him to practise self-denying acts of charity in order to promote Christ's kingdom here on earth, and to help to remove, as far as possible, the wants of his neighbour. A Church which only cares for the maintaining of her own narrow boundaries, cannot have much of the spirit and mind of the Founder of the Church universal and needs the Spirit's operation to awaken her to a sense of her duty and obligation. How shall the heathen and the Jew believe in Christ, of whom they have not heard? and

how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent? These weighty questions are directed by the Apostle Paul to every Church and to each member of the same. Faith and love in the Christian will induce him, not merely to spread Christ's light and truth among his fellow-men, but also to administer to their wants and necessities as far as he is able. Let us not forget that Christ has identified Himself with the wants and miseries of mankind, and said, that if we give meat to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, and visit the prisoner or the sick, it is as if we had done all for Him. Oh! if all that worship in Christ's temple of religion and humanity, were true worshippers, and as such, would willingly and cheerfully give out of their substance all they could for the promotion of Christ's kingdom, and for the furtherance of true humanity, we should not hear and see so much of misery and wretchedness, so much of ignorance and vice, so much of opposition and hostility towards Christ and His religion. The multitude that worshipped in the Jewish temple, we are told, cast money into the treasury, and many that were rich cast in much. None passed that treasury without putting something in it. O, how many worship in a Christian church and give nothing! How many rich pass our Church treasures and give, not as the rich Jews of old much, but very little. If we have really faith and love we are asked to show it in our life and actions. Work is the true touchstone of the Christian's faith. Christ as then, so now sits opposite the treasury and looks at our hand as well as on our heart, and may each one of us hear Him say, "He has done all he could."

XVI.

The True Follower of Christ a Light to the World.

MATT. V. 14, 15.

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house."

I.—We all know how important and necessary the light and warmth of the sun is in the household of nature. Life and strength, growth and development, the varieties of colour, the beauties of nature are promoted and sustained by the light of the sun, and without it we should have but chaos, or what would very much resemble it. Hence, the very first creative word that emanated from the great Creator, when the elements were still in chaos was "Let there be light," and with its appearance began the process of the gradual development of nature and its forces, of life and its various and manifold manifestations, until the present beautiful *cosmos* with its teeming myriads of beings, man the lord of creation included, stood forth in all its beauty and harmony, reflecting the wisdom, power, and goodness of the great Creator. The great and important part physical light plays in nature makes it a fit emblem or symbol of everything that is luminous and beneficial in itself and possessing the power of spreading and influencing others for good, as for instance, clear intelligence, sound knowledge and principles, and true science. The very opposite of

light is darkness, and this stands symbolically for everything that is irrational, untrue, and pernicious, for ignorance, superstition, error and vice ; in fact, for everything that hinders the intellectual, moral, and spiritual progress of man. Light is life ; enlightenment progress. Thus far we shall find ourselves in perfect agreement with men of science and knowledge, in fact, with every intelligent and well-informed man, but as soon as we begin to speak of light and darkness from a spiritual or religious point of view, we may confidently expect to meet with diverging opinions, and with opposition more or less fierce and bitter. Some will strenuously maintain that there is nothing in man but light, whilst others again will affirm that there is very little light in him, far more darkness than light. The first will assert that the natural light in man is so strong and powerful as to be quite sufficient to enable him to grow and develop in everything good, human, and divine, without requiring any support or help from a Divine power, whilst the latter will defend the opinion that as the natural light is so feeble and dim in man he stands sorely in need of supernatural light to kindle afresh in him a light sufficient to enable him to do the good, right, just and true. Those who entertain the opinion that man has sufficient natural light in him for his moral and spiritual development, naturally express no desire to need supernatural light, nor Him who emphatically declared "I am the Light of the world." Again, those who believe that there is hardly any light in man at all, are either philosophical pessimists, having no confidence in man, nor any sympathy

in his struggle after light and truth, or they are Christians, who maintain that man in his fall has thereby lost all his goodness, and is, consequently, totally depraved and desperately wicked ever since. We may agree or disagree with these, no doubt, well-meaning Christians, as to the power and extent of the darkness or light in man ; there may, perhaps, be more darkness than light, or more light than darkness in him, in what we call his natural state, but we are convinced that those who deny altogether sin or darkness in man, have certainly a very superficial knowledge of man, his nature and being, his tendencies and inclinations, his passions and desires. The light of reason had not proved sufficient, before the appearance of Christ, to solve satisfactorily man's spiritual perplexities, to dispel his darkness and give full satisfaction to his soul's real wants and aspirations. Good and necessary as this light of reason is, without which we should not hold that high and exalted position in creation that we do with it, man, as he is constituted, requires a divine light kindled within him, that he may be enabled to see his God as He really is, and serve Him as he is in duty bound to do. Philosophical reasoning and speculation have never been able to satisfy the religious wants of mankind, have never been able to supplant religion altogether among any nation. A true religion cannot well be without philosophy, as it will greatly help to justify religious belief before the tribunal of reason, and suggest proper and adequate forms in which to represent the light and life that is in us ; but neither philosophy nor science will ever give satisfaction to the craving of man's soul after

peace with God and the certainty man requires as to his eternal destiny. They would trespass upon strange grounds were they to undertake to do what does not belong to their province, and can at best but remotely concern them. If man's spiritual or religious nature requires light and life, as there is no doubt that it does, it can only be given to him from Him who is the fulness of light and life. Hence He that proceeded from God and came for this very purpose into our world, could in justice and truth declare "I am the light of the world."

II. There never was any founder of a religion or philosophical system, who has made such a startling declaration—"I am the light of the world!"—as Christ did. He does not say that He brings more light and knowledge on an interesting and important subject, than any other founder of religion ever did, nor that He is a light, even a great light among the many lights which have been shining on man's paths, which is to lead him to his God, and to his eternal destiny, but He emphatically affirms: "I am THE LIGHT of the world." He thereby declared that what the sun is to the physical world, this He is to man's spiritual world, the world within him. As the sun sheds its rays on the physical world, promoting the growth and development of everything living in nature, equally so, Christ asserts, does He, as the Sun of Righteousness, shining on believing hearts and souls, promote their growth and development. A very bold declaration of His this undoubtedly is, and calculated to awaken surprise and astonishment even among the boldest and most daring of men, for if it is true, then men

can as little be in their spiritual world without Him, as they can be in the physical world without the sun. If it is true, then men refusing to open their spiritual eyes, prevent by so doing, their spiritual growth and development. And yet, bold as this declaration of Christ is, it is nevertheless the boldness of a truth which can defy all opposition. When it was first uttered it surprised and astonished His contemporaries, and shocked their reasoning faculties completely, having never expected to hear anything like it from Him, of whom they knew where He was born and who His parents were. It consequently provoked their fiercest opposition, and led them to the firm determination, cost what it may, this boasted, universal spiritual light must once for all be put out altogether. In nailing Christ to the cross, His enemies really thought that they had extinguished this spiritual sun, the Sun of Righteousness, and the world would no more hear of such a light, and of such as walk in this light. But have they really accomplished what they in their blind zeal thought they had done and succeeded so well in? I need not to tell you that these fluttering bats have not been able even to cloud this spiritual sun, much less to extinguish it altogether. The light continued to shine in spite of all their exertions to the contrary, and has ever since been shining, and will never cease to shine on the spiritual horizon of believing Christians. There is now, even among intelligent unbelievers, no doubt that Christ was really a great light, although they may refuse to accept Him as *the* great light to lighten man's spiritual world. It is a fact that cannot

be denied, that Christ has thrown light on the being and nature of God and His attributes, has made known man's real and true nature, his true and genuine spiritual wants, disclosed to man his eternal hope and expectation, and this in a manner so clear, decisive, and satisfactory, as never was approached by any one before Him. His light has dispelled the dark clouds in which man's soul was enveloped respecting God, man's relation to Him, man's relation to his neighbour, and his own eternal destiny. In this divine light man can now see his own spiritual world with all its heights and depths ; he can learn to know all the pure and impure springs of all his thoughts and actions ; he can distinguish the true from the false, the good from the evil, the divine in him from that which is warring against it. Self-knowledge, so necessary to man's spiritual progress and improvement, man can acquire by letting that light of the world, that light emanating from the purest and holiest fountain, shine into his heart and soul, into his inner world. He will then find much in it which has no right to maintain any authority, but must rather be kept under constant subjection. He will, however, also by this divine light discover that which is good and valuable, and must at all costs not only be preserved, but be brought to honour and power. Useful and necessary as such self-knowledge is, the task it proposes to the possessor of it would far exceed his strength were it unaided. It is one thing to know what is to be done, and even how it best can be accomplished, but it is quite another thing whether we have the right means or the power to carry successfully out what our

information advises us as necessary to do. Hence Christ, the light of man's spiritual world, does not only bring man to the knowledge of his spiritual state and wants, but He imparts also the strength and power to do the good, true, and just, the will of our Father in heaven, and thus live a life of holiness and godliness. The light Christ imparts to all His true followers is the divine knowledge and power, expanding and invigorating every faculty in them, so that the divine light that is kindled in them anew, will throw out its brilliant rays, and thus lighten the paths of others walking in the darkness of ignorance, superstition and sin. "I am the Light of the world," says Christ, "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

III. What Christ is to the believer, that the believer is, in a certain sense, to be to the unbeliever. The light Christians have received from a life of faith in Him, this they are required to let shine in all its divine lustre on those who walk in the darkness of superstition, ignorance, unbelief, sin or vice. And this light, shining through a Christian believer's holy and godly life, Christ is confident will have the good effect of inducing men to turn wistfully and inquiringly their soul's eye also to the divine source from which they derive their spiritual light and life. At all events this is certain, that He requires of all His true followers to be children of light, who exemplify, in their life and actions, the divine life and light that is in them; and if the light of life is really and truly in them it will most assuredly also shine out of them, and men will see their good

works and glorify our Father which is in heaven. It is the nature of light to shine, and the rays of the physical sun are so subtle as to penetrate through every crack or crevice, and manifest themselves by their light and warmth. Equally so should the divine light Christ kindles in believing men, be visible in and through them, so that there may not be a shadow of doubt that they are His real followers, children of light, children of God, and heirs of salvation. A hidden light, a light put under a bushel, has no meaning, serves no reasonable purpose ; for it is meant to shine, and shine it will and must, wherever it is, and from this, its visible effect, men shall conclude as to the invisible cause of it. Enough : the true Christian is, and will be, a child of light, lightening every one on his path of darkness to see the dangers he is exposed to, and be induced to flee from its threatening consequences. The Christian a child of light ! Is not this bitter irony, cutting satire ? Do we not constantly hear him reproached by men of knowledge and science, by the unbelieving masses of people, that he is rather a child of darkness and superstition, shunning light and knowledge and hindering progress and advancement ? Alas ! we do ; but, nevertheless, it is true that those who are really Christ's followers, filled and actuated by the light of life and sustained by divine grace, are children of light, and do let their light so shine before men that they may see their good works. They may be few in number, almost lost in the great mass of those who profess to be Christ's followers whilst their life and actions belie this their hypocritical profession. Still, Christ has His true followers, be they few or

many, who are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. A genuine Christian, possessing the divine light, will most certainly, sincerely, and earnestly, love and promote light and truth in everything that can be of interest and service to man individually, and to society and mankind collectively. Light and truth, progress and advancement in the intellectual, moral, and spiritual world, in the political, social, and religious world ; in knowledge, science, literature, and art, this the true followers of Him who emphatically declared, "I am the Light of the world," will love, pursue, and promote with all their strength and might. Children of light, as true Christians are and must be, will hate nothing so much as darkness and ignorance everywhere and in everything. It has become difficult to persuade intelligent unbelieving men that the Christian is really a child of light, for, alas ! many who pride themselves on the honoured name of Christian, disgrace it by their works or actions. And yet this ought to convince the unbeliever and sceptic, that these so-called Christians are not children of light as Christ said His true followers would be, for He clearly enough stated, that the life of His followers would be the true reflection of the light that is in them. The unbeliever, for various reasons, suspects the professing Christian. From a distance he observes him with a telescope in his hand, and in his presence he makes use of a powerful microscope, and all this with the intention of discovering some dark spot in his Christian character. Astronomers tell us that there are even spots on the disc of the sun, and try to find out their origin and nature, and why should we not be able to detect

some speck or blot on the Christian character, since even the best and brightest shining Christian cannot claim to be perfect, to have realized the high standard of perfection that He possessed, who is the Light of the world, knew no sin, and consequently never had any spot on His divine character. The physical sun is sun still in spite of its specks, and the believing Christian may be a true child of light, in spite of his failings, weaknesses, and sins. The believing Christian is fully convinced that he has all his lifetime to keep on a constant warfare with the darkness that is still in him, and the further he advances in grace and the knowledge of Christ Jesus, the more the light of life he has in him will grow in strength and vigour, pervading his whole soul, his whole life and being, and thus manifest itself in all his works, in all his actions. The children of light, the believing Christians, will be known as such, when Christ, the Light of the spiritual world, is shining through them, through their life and actions, spreading light and truth, promoting the true well-being of their fellow-men, breathing love and goodwill towards all men, and yearning for the salvation of every human being. And these glorious qualities wrought in the children of light by the efficacy of God's redeeming love and mercy, and by the renewing power of His Spirit, will appeal most forcibly to the heart and consciences of men, and will find in many a hearty response. "They will glorify your Father which is in heaven." Amen.

XVII.

Eternity in the Heart.

ECCLES. III. II.

"He hath made every thing beautiful in His time: also He hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end."

I. The opinion expressed in the text which is to engage our attention is of such importance that we should have been drawn to it had we met with it in any profane writer. It is useless to discuss whether the Preacher himself was fully alive to the importance and interest this truth has for men individually and collectively. Probably he may have stated to us this important truth as the result of mature reflection and keen observation. He may have been fully alive to its importance and value, and as such considered it worthy to be transmitted to succeeding ages. It is, however, a truth which thinking minds, the greatest philosophers, have searched after and explained in a variety of ways. It is a truth which forces itself on the conviction of every reflecting mind with irresistible power, and explains satisfactorily the otherwise mysterious phenomena of man's religious tendencies and aspirations. Hence, whether the Preacher may have understood its great importance and deep significance or not certainly we have a right to elucidate it in the light of the New Testament revelation, in the light of philosophical research, and in the light of human experience. He has been enumerating all the

various vicissitudes of man's life, the constant changes it is exposed to, and the variety of its manifold circumstances, conditions and dispositions, in fact, dwelling on that which is fleeting and transitory in man's mundane life, when, on a sudden, a light flashed upon his mind, dispelling the dark and gloomy thoughts on which he was brooding, and revealing to him that which is abiding and eternal in the midst of so much that is transitory and perishable. The Preacher became aware that all occurring events in the life and history of mankind have their appointed time, when they have to take their start, and even a period of duration is assigned to them, and all events have again a particular epoch prepared suited to their particular mission. There is an intelligent plan and design to be recognized, perfect order and harmony to be discerned, and divine wisdom and goodness to be acknowledged in the history and development of the human race. However much that history may appear to the shallow and superficial contemporary incoherent and chaotic, yea even the result of a blind chance, yet the highest intelligence and wisdom, who presides over the destinies of nations, peoples, and individuals, directs and overrules everything so as to harmonize with His eternal plan. To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven. Everything happens at its appointed time, and the right time is chosen for the right thing, for the God of creation is also the God of providence. Independent of man, of his plans and actions, there is the eternal plan of unerring wisdom, who has assigned to every man his place and work here on earth,

and His purpose is carried out at every period of man's history. God has made everything beautiful in his time, says the Preacher, meaning that He has appointed the best possible time, and chosen the best possible means to have His eternal purpose with mankind carried out. No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end, says the Preacher, and this is self evident, as it is impossible for man, be he the wisest, to state with any certainty what may and will happen throughout all the succeeding and coming ages up to the end of this world. In this world of constant changes, and moving on the ever-flowing stream of time, man has nevertheless a something within him which is destined to change for the better ; a something which never ceases to exist ; a something which reaches beyond space and time, and this something the Preacher calls eternity, which God has set in his heart. The best commentators agree in translating the Hebrew word *olam* in our text not with world, as the A.V. has it, but with *eternity*. A surprising but comforting truth the Preacher has communicated to us, a truth verified by many of the most profound philosophers among heathens and Christians. It is well-known to every intelligent and studious person that it is maintained that man has intuitive convictions which are natural to him. It is natural to us to reason from effect to cause, and again from cause to effect, and we can appeal to every man, if he still deserves the name, as to the principles of right and wrong. As conscious as every man feels of his personal being and existence, equally so is every man conscious of his dependence

upon a higher Being, the great and intelligent Cause of all causes, for God has set eternity in man's heart. Before man can reason correctly and logically as to the being and existence of the eternal, the God-consciousness within him prompts him to worship and adore Him upon whom he feels himself dependent, and endeavour to be at peace with Him. The religious history of mankind confirms this beyond all doubt, hence Cicero is right, when he asks: "Where is a people or tribe which has not, without any instruction, a certain preconception of the existence of a divinity?"

"There are native religious tendencies in the mind, ever working but ever liable to be abused and perverted, and requiring to be called forth into healthy exercise by the presentation of suitable objects, and indeed to be guided and directed by a standard of revelation" (M'Cosh). Tertullian being convinced of the native religious tendencies in man, boldly declared that, "the soul has a natural tendency towards Christianity" (*anima naturaliter Christiana*). God, says the Preacher, "has set eternity in man's heart."

II. God has set eternity in man's heart! Within our weak and frail body, subject to disease, death, and dissolution, is lodged something that is of heaven and divine, and as such, imperishable and eternal. This most precious gift of the Eternal fills and pervades man's whole inward being, his mind and affections. It betrays its divine origin by its aspirations heavenwards, and it manifests its divine nature by the desire after the eternal, which alone can

fully and entirely satisfy it. Hence, this eternity within us allows us no rest, grants no respite, but prompts us ever to be active, ever to be moving onward and progressing; ever to increase in knowledge and wisdom, ever to advance in holiness and godliness, ever to strive after moral perfection. This eternity in our hearts allows us no rest in our minds, but stimulates us ever to go on searching and inquiring after truth, for truth is eternal. We are driven by an inward necessity to search after truth of whatever nature or quality it may be, physical, moral, or religious, for it is only truth or the knowledge of the eternal, and ever-abiding, in this transitory world, that the eternity within us craves after. This unrest of man's mind resulting from the undying personal self in us, which manifests itself in man's unremitted exertions in search after truth, whilst it is a sure and unmistakable testimony to the God of all truth, is at the same time that which distinguishes him from brutes and demons. The true nobility of man's nature is evinced by his unquenching thirst after knowledge and truth, and the readiness manifested in bringing any sacrifice required, be it even life itself. History has preserved to us the names of many such noble heroes and martyrs in the cause of truth; but by far the greatest number of such truth-loving men and women have had their names written in the book of Him who seeth in secret and rewards openly. It has, indeed, often the appearance as if men in the restlessness of their minds were hunting after mere phantoms, after mere shadows; and no doubt many, alas! waste their divine energies in such unprofitable pursuits. It would,

however, be a base calumny were we on their account to suspect the multitudes of honest, truth-seeking, and truth-loving men and women, young and old. To the honour of the eternity within us, which aspires after truth, it must be stated, that no untruths can pass unprotested among reasonable and conscious men, known and declared as such. It passes often, and even rapidly, *only* when clothed in the garment of truth. Man's unrest of mind can only find true and lasting rest in the Eternal, the God of all truth. Not that then the eternal Sabbath of rest for our mind begins, but the Eternal laid hold of by faith will be to us the strongest motive power to pursue our search after truth with unremitting zeal and unquenchable ardour, and with the firm conviction that it will and must ultimately prevail. Man's restlessness of mind finds rest in the eternal mind the source and centre of all intelligence and truth.

God has set eternity in man's heart, says the Preacher, and this holds good also as regarding the working of his heart and conscience. This heart of ours, with its longings and disquietudes, with its troubles and perplexities, nothing will be able, fully and lastingly, to fill and satisfy it, but the eternal love of the Father in the manifestation of His Son. Nothing this earth can give us in riches, honour, or position, in pleasure and enjoyment, can still and satisfy the craving desire of our heart, except the eternal love of the Father in the Son. It is infinite in its longings and aspirations, and nothing but the infinite love and mercy as offered and accepted in Christ the Saviour, can and does satisfy it, and this most effectually and lastingly. God has set eternity in

man's heart, and this is felt in the working of our conscience. We experience a constant struggle between good and evil, we feel opposed when evil is proposed, and are bitterly rebuked and tortured when evil has been done by us. We shed tears of remorse when alone, and confess with a broken and contrite heart to God : "Against Thee have I sinned." It is the eternity within us, through the instrumentality of the conscience, that demonstrates to us that we have been sinning against the holy and the just One. On the other hand, when we do what is good and true, when we are faithful and just, endeavouring honestly to discharge our duties towards God and man, we rejoice and are happy. The eternity within us is then in harmony with the Eternal, the Judge of all. This eternity set in man's heart, of which the Preacher speaks, finds its true and adequate expression in the hope which fills every heart and soul, for hope is eternal. We may live to be ever so old, but we shall never cease to hope. Hope is always before us, in advance of us, succeeding every fleeting moment, and if we are true men, filled with faith and love, it will ever be a faithful and comforting companion through life, and will ever point us to heaven, the eternity beyond space and time. God has set eternity in man's heart, stimulating him ever to search after truth, and above all, the God of all truth ; which yearns after infinite love, the God of love and mercy ; which ever reminds him to be just, true, and good, having to do with a God of justice and holiness, and which inspires him with hope, maintained even in the face of death, aspiring to an endless life, the God of salvation. The soul has a natural

tendency towards Christianity, for God has set eternity in man's heart.

III. God has set eternity in man's heart ! Great the gift, great the responsibility. Much has been given us, much is required of us. Nothing impossible is indeed required, but that what the eternity in us in union with God, the Eternal, can and will accomplish in and through us. It is the permanent duty of man, the possessor of this heavenly gift, to bring by faith his eternity within him in close union with the Eternal, the beneficent Giver, to love and pursue truth and justice, to cultivate moral purity, to strive after godliness and holiness, to moral perfection. We should be ungrateful to the Eternal and do violence to the eternity within us, were we to search after all truth except religious truth, were we to spend our love and affection only on those near and dear to us, and obstinately refuse to love, with our whole heart and soul, the Author and Sustainer of our life and existence, and who has loved us with an everlasting love in Christ Jesus. We should be practising a very spurious kind of justice, where we only to endeavour to be just and right before man and not before Him who looketh deeper than man does, and who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity in the inward part. It would be the height of folly to strive to live in peace with our neighbours, and at the same time be at enmity with our Father in heaven, and it would be staking our eternal happiness and doing violence to the eternity within us, were we to set our hearts and affections on things transient and perishable, and thus have but a miserable hope. We may be deceived, or deceive

ourselves, either way it can only be to our own great injury. That reasonable and truth-loving men may be able to interpret and understand the nature, wants, and aspirations of the eternity within us, for this very purpose has God revealed Himself in His Word and through Christ, so that they are without excuse. It is also of no use to deny the existence of the eternity within us, for at all times and among all nations men felt conscious that they had eternity in their hearts, and consequently had religious wants which were to be satisfied as well as they could. And it is an unprofitable and iniquitous undertaking to endeavour to persuade man that he is to be irreligious and live without God and hope in the world. As well may we endeavour to extinguish the light of the sun, as well may we try to keep ourselves alive while refusing to supply our bodies with food and raiment, as to suppress this eternity in us or satisfy it with mere husks. Because man has set eternity in his heart, he is a religious being, and as such will and must worship, and as such will and must feel his utter dependence on the Eternal, the God of all truth, comfort, and consolation. You may pull down altars, you may demolish churches, you may burn the Bible and kill the priest ; yea, you may even be as audacious as Voltaire was, and say respecting Christ : *Ecraze le infame !* You may, perhaps, by so doing succeed to take from man the worthy and true object of his worship which Christianity presents to him, viz., God's redeeming love in Christ, but you will in no account succeed in annihilating the eternity God has set in man's heart, which is his greatest comfort and con-

solation, and the surest and best guarantee of an eternity beyond the grave. As long as Christianity is faithfully preached, and Christ is set before sinful, struggling, and dying men as their Saviour and Divine Teacher, men will be drawn to Him and His religion as satisfying their souls' wants.

In this world of constant changes and losses, where our dearest wishes often come to grief, where our fondest hopes often meet with sore disappointment, where those near and dear to us are often taken from us when most needed, it is the greatest comfort to know and believe that which conduces to our eternal peace and happiness—our eternity within us and those we loved survives the wreck of time. Our immortal personal self, will, however, successfully withstand all the storms and tempests of life, bear with dignity all the vicissitudes of fortune, undergo with cheerful hope all the changing processes through the various periods of our existence, when by faith in God's redeeming love we stand on the eternal rock that cannot be moved. Thus standing firm and immovable we shall be able, like the great hero of faith, to say: "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." The things seen and temporal in all their beauty and grandeur, are not to be compared with man, in whose heart God has set eternity; for they shall pass away and vanish, but his eternal per-

sonality remains throughout all eternity, made blissful through faith in God's love. What is all the glory of this transient world in comparison to the eternal glory to which the God of all grace has called us by Christ Jesus? Hence the believing Christian rejoices in hope, in the sure expectation of that eternal glory, when this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality, the eternal in us clothed with immortality and endless bliss. God has set eternity in man's heart, and if this eternity is united by faith to God through Christ, sanctified, enlightened and guided by God's Spirit, then, though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day, until the day of dissolution comes, and the eternity within us, having shaken off the perishable body and being clothed with incorruption and immortality, enters the place prepared by Christ, the city which has foundations eternal in the heavens.

XVIII.

Festus's Uncontrollable Temper.

ACTS XXVI. 24.

"And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad."

I.—Paul stands before Porcius Festus, the new Roman governor of Judæa, and still in the humiliating attitude of a criminal under the grave charges of heresy, sacrilege, and treason. If Felix, his predecessor, had been what he ought to have been, and what his position required of him to be, *viz.*, an impartial and conscientious judge, the apostle would have been liberated as soon as his case was heard, for it must have been clear and evident to all, and most assuredly to Felix, that the charges brought against him were false and untenable. Felix, however, was an unprincipled, venal, and frivolous man, and hence, in spite of the apostle's defence regarding his innocence, and in spite of the unmistakable certainty as to the malicious intentions of his fanatical accusers, he kept him confined in Cæsarea under military custody. Under this unscrupulous governor Paul might have ended his days in prison, but fortunately for him, Felix was recalled. As it was, he had already spent two precious years in confinement, and the least Felix could have done to make good the wrong inflicted upon the apostle would have been, in leaving Judæa, to set him free,

but he was not capable of such an act of justice. He left him in prison, we are told, willing to show the Jews a pleasure. His successor, Porcius Festus, was in every respect different from him. He was, on the whole, a judicious, honest and reasonable man, desirous to administer impartial justice. He had hardly arrived at Cæsarea, the seat of the Roman governor, when Paul's case engaged his attention. On his way to his residence he stayed for some days in Jerusalem, where the Jews, Paul's implacable enemies, were anxious to get his consent to have him tried by the Sanhedrim in Jerusalem, but Festus did not feel disposed to grant them this favour. He advised them to come to Cæsarea, and there to bring their accusation in due form before him, and they had no alternative left; either they must give up their malicious intention altogether, or do as they were advised to do. They chose the latter, and arrived at Cæsarea. Two years had already passed since they employed the cunning Roman lawyer, Tertullus, to prosecute Paul before Felix, and yet their animosity against him has lost nothing in vehemence and bitterness. They were determined, if possible, to procure a conviction against him, should they even swear their souls away, and nothing but his blood would quench their burning fanaticism. Oh, the perseverance and obstinacy of a blind zeal fired on by religious fanaticism! After two years they are here again with the same unfounded accusations against the same innocent man! Two years of imprisonment, two years of inactivity of a man like Paul, for whom thousands of souls were

waiting for divine light and truth, was, in the estimation of these Jewish fanatics as nothing ; his death alone could satisfy them. They again tried to persuade Festus to have Paul removed to Jerusalem to be there judged by the Jewish authorities ; and when the Governor evinced a readiness to acquiesce in this their wish, the illustrious prisoner maintained his right to be judged by a Roman court of justice, and he appealed to Cæsar. This appeal made it impossible for Festus to yield to the clamorous demand of the Jews, as he had now no more jurisdiction over the prisoner. It made it necessary for Festus to send the apostle to Rome, there to be brought before the supreme tribunal of the emperor. Festus knew his duty thoroughly, and was willing to discharge it, but he knew also that he had to send to Rome with the prisoner all the acts and documents bearing on the trial, accompanied with his own personal opinions respecting the case. What was he to say ? He has heard much from Paul's enemies, but very little from Paul himself. He was well aware that all the anger and malice the Jews bore against the apostle were due to a difference of opinion respecting religion, and he was conscious he was not competent to pass a correct opinion on such disputes. He therefore hailed with joy the arrival at Cæsarea of his friend Agrippa, with his sister Bernice, and required to have the prisoner brought before him, Agrippa being present, that he might be able to advise him in the matter, so as to have somewhat to write to Rome. On the appointed day Paul was ushered into the audience chamber, where he

found, besides the governor, Agrippa and Bernice, who came with great pomp and display, with a suite of military officers and the *élite* of the inhabitants of Cæsarea, and was asked to state his defence. He endeavoured to clear himself of all the charges brought against him, and, by so doing, he had not only to relate the wondrous change that had occurred within him, how it happened that from a persecuting Saul he became a suffering Paul, but also what his Christian faith and hope were. To a Jew, or to one acquainted with Judaism, his statement would have been somewhat intelligible, and, perhaps, even reasonable, but to Festus, the Roman, it seemed only to have been the sound of so many unintelligible and mysterious words, no doubt spoken with sincerity. Instead of enlightening him on the subject in dispute between Paul and his accusers, it rather increased his perplexity, and left him in deeper ignorance than he was before. He gave vent to his feelings of disappointment by interrupting the speaker, and, in a loud voice said: "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad."

II. What occurred to Paul in the audience room at Cæsarea, has since that time been often experienced by Christ's most devoted disciples. It is not of unfrequent occurrence that men who are utterly ignorant of the principles and doctrines of Christianity, and who are utter strangers to the new life born of God by faith in Christ, should feel bewildered, and even lose their temper, when they meet a sincere and enthusiastic Christian. These unreasonable people, who never trouble themselves about

their souls' wants, never care earnestly and conscientiously to study and investigate the Christian's ground of belief, are as intolerant and fanatic towards the believing Christian, as any Pharisee and Sadducee ever was against Christ and His apostles. All is done by these unbelieving fanatics to discredit the Christian truth, and to throw suspicion on every possessor of the same. They seem to think that what they consider to be above their comprehension no reasonable man can possibly be convinced of its veracity and truth, and that no conscientious man can make such truth the rule of his conduct in life, influencing his thoughts and actions. Behind this apparent zeal for man's dignity lies, undoubtedly, hidden the enmity against all that has any reference to the supernatural. Religion has to do with all that is supernatural and mysterious, with things invisible, such as God, man's soul, man's spiritual life, with its perplexities, fears, and aspirations; and a man may succeed by a slow or rapid process of false reasoning, or by gradually yielding to impure inclination, passion, or lust, or by engrossing himself entirely in worldly affairs, in suppressing and stifling his soul's longing after reconciliation and peace, and practically live without God and hope in the world. Nothing is easier than for man to persuade himself that there is no God, for any fool can do this. With many it seems little is required to throw off the hated yoke of religion, with its sacred duties and obligations; and men, in doing this, have the audacity to call such an unpardonable folly an enlightened and reasonable act. They are, however, at liberty to live and

act towards religion, towards Christianity, as they please ; the responsibility they owe to God cannot be shaken off. Such unscrupulous men must not think that all men feel disposed to act thus concerning their best and lasting interests, nor that any true, believing Christian will be found willing to give up his faith, hope, and love, in order to please them. Christian truths carry with them a divine power to convince and convert, and those who are not willing to accept them, will never have an idea what a benign influence they exercise over believing man's whole spiritual life. These truths have changed the Apostle Paul from a Jewish Pharisee to a Christian ambassador, from being a fanatical persecutor into a patiently enduring and suffering disciple of Christ ; and it was for these truths that his life was in danger, his enemies succeeding, by false accusation, to make a prisoner of him. Invisible causes had produced a glorious visible and palpable change in the man, as they still do on all those who allow themselves to be influenced by them. It would have been more becoming to Festus, the Governor, before whom Paul stood, when hearing of the wondrous change that had taken place with his prisoner, to be first of all assured of the truth of this change, and then reason from the effect to the cause. It would have been an act of justice on his part to let Paul finish his statement and to allow Agrippa, whom he considered more competent to pass an opinion on religious matters, to decide on the subject in dispute. It was, however, unpardonable on his part to allow his temper to get the better of him, and to interrupt the speaker with a loud

exclamation : “ Paul, thou art mad ; much learning has made thee mad ! ” The man was utterly ignorant of the subject dwelt upon by the apostle with such emphasis and enthusiasm, and in acting as he did, he was insulting, and also unjust, to the prisoner and to the divine truth which he defended. The Roman high official would not understand how one could possibly be enthusiastic about religion, of which *he* knew nothing at all, and was puzzled how a man, like the apostle Paul, could allow himself to be persecuted and imprisoned for such a string of unintelligible and mystical words as he has heard. Both the apostle’s statement, as well as the fervency with which it was uttered, perplexed the man, and in his perplexity and impatience, he charged him with being mad. And such and similar unreasonable and unjust charges are often, even in Christian countries, brought against Christ’s most devoted servants, both men and women, against those, in whose heart and soul, the love of God in Christ has kindled a fire of holy zeal, devotion, and enthusiasm for all that is of God and Christ. We usually praise those who take life in earnest, devoting all their time and energy in promoting the work before them. We like to see a man pursuing his work with zeal and enthusiasm, and to be what he ought to be with his whole heart and soul. We think it right and reasonable to be so, but when a Christian is such with his whole heart and soul ; when he is zealous and devoted to Christ and His cause, then this, his thoroughness, is called *madness*.

III. The true Christian of Paul’s character and disposition, who can in all sincerity and truthfulness reply to

invectives and insinuations on the part of the enemies of Christ and His religion, that he speaks words of truth and soberness, can safely leave his vindication to Him from whom both proceed. He knows that the enemies of divine truth, either from ignorance or malice, have called the divine Master Beelzebub, and accused Him of being possessed of a devil, and he is, therefore, not surprised when His chief apostle is called a madman ; nor will he be so when he and all devoted disciples of Christ meet with a similar treatment. In the eyes of the enemies of Christianity, the greatest folly will ever be to be a Christian, and all manner of evil will be spoken of us falsely the more we exhibit by our walk and conversation the renewing power of Christ's love within us. The true Christian is, therefore, not responsible for the enmity the Christian truth as such awakens, as his divine Master has prepared him to expect such enmity against His truth and hatred towards those who accept it, and earnestly strive to live in harmony with it. We are, however, responsible for the scandal our own strange behaviour causes, and for the enmity towards divine truth, if represented by us in an offensive manner, making it appear unreasonable and unintelligible to honest and truth-loving men. We are responsible for the enmity of unbelievers against Christ and His religion, if we force the Christian truth into a singular and unattractive form, and make other men's Christian discipleship dependent upon the strict acceptance of this our own peculiar manner in stating it. Christ's words are spirit and life, but if they are kept in absolute and dead forms they are sure to be

objectionable to many, and even engender hostility against them. We are further responsible for the enmity against Christianity and its true professors, if we allow our zeal to degenerate into fanaticism and intolerance. I am perfectly aware that truth is exclusive and cannot tolerate falsehood or error, but let truth only be set forth in all its simplicity, purity, and sacredness, and by its inherent divine power, it will and must ultimately conquer and be victorious. Let truth only be announced and declared in faith and love, and let us only be anxious, not that we ourselves, but that the truth is to gain a victory, then we shall have less cause to complain of opposition against it. We shall then allow truth to display its own convincing power, to take its own time required in accomplishing that for which it was given, whilst we shall in our activity exercise Christian patience and perseverance, for all men are not alike. Christ's truth is a life-giving power to all men, to the many different types of individual life, and where this is effectual we shall indeed have no uniformity, but certainly, a heavenly unity. Believing men will be united with Christ, and through Him with each other. Let a Christian zeal be tempered with Christian love, patience, and forbearance, and if we shall not succeed in winning souls to Christ we shall at all events not deserve the reproach of having been a hindrance to them. Let those with whom we come in contact, whether friend or foe, believer or unbeliever, behold our peacefulness, cheerfulness, and happiness; see our self-denying, humble, charitable, loving, and active life, take note of the lively

interest we take in all that is true, beautiful, and good, all that can promote true knowledge and science ; all that can cultivate the taste and manners of the people and enhance their happiness ; then we shall be a testimony to the truth of Christianity as being the power and wisdom of God. If we are, in all we do, influenced and actuated by the Spirit of Christ, and yet we give offence to those who are utterly ignorant of Christ and His religion, we shall not be guilty of having provoked it. "Blessed," says Christ, "are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake." True Christian heroism is such suffering for Christ's sake in the defence and upholding of His truth, in His spirit, fighting, not with carnal, but with spiritual, weapons. Offence will and must come, partly from the natural enmity against Gospel truth, partly either from indifference or ignorance towards the same ; "But," says Christ, "woe to him by whom the offence cometh." We must be prepared to suffer for Christ's sake, expect to be reviled and have all manner of evil said against us ; but we must, by God's help, endeavour, like the Apostle Paul, to have always "a conscience void of offence towards God and man." It is the greatest honour that can be conferred upon us, that we should be deemed worthy to suffer for Christ's, for divine truth's sake, but it can only be dishonour to us if we suffer the consequences of our own sins and follies. The cross of Christ is the symbol of suffering for truth's sake, whereby an eternal glorious victory has been procured to saving truth.

XIX.

The Parable of the Talents; or, Trust Renewed and Trust Withdrawn.

MATT. XXV. 29.

"For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

I.—Our text stands not only in close connection with the parable of The Talents, uttered by Christ, but embodies the principle which this parable is meant to illustrate. Apart from it, there is danger that superficial thinkers and dissatisfied individuals may condemn it as a cruel and unjust sentence, meant to justify not only the unequal distribution of wealth and power, but to encourage malicious persons to oppress, and even hold out an inducement to rob the poor of the little they may have. The poor and needy, dissatisfied with their condition, might be tempted to reproach Christ, the boasted friend of humanity, with favouring too much the privileged classes of society, the rich, the influential and powerful, whilst to them, little as they may have and enjoy, He holds out the disheartening prospect of losing their all. Shallow or designing men may misinterpret or pervert this sentence uttered by Christ, in such a manner as to make Him say all this so foreign to His mind and purpose, so repugnant to His feelings and character, so utterly contrary to His life and actions, known to us. He came unto the world to benefit man and society,

to break down the middle wall of partition between man and man, and to link men together by the bonds of divine love, but not to instigate one class of men against the other, least of all the man of wealth and position against the poor and lowly. He never taught the rich to act thus, nor has He ever infused into the poor the spirit of dissatisfaction or hatred towards the rich. Like His Father in heaven, he was no respecter of persons, poor or rich, high or low, learned or ignorant, were all alike to Him as such. He saw in every man only *the man*, one worthy of being raised to the high position and dignity of a child of God, and an heir of salvation. As the Prince of peace, He imparts peace to every true follower of His, and through them He spreads peace and goodwill towards all classes of men. The principle advocated in our text, as we said, will be rightly understood and readily acquiesced in by all intelligent and right-minded men, if due attention is paid to the parable of The Talents from which it is deducted. Christ, after having given the parable of the Ten Virgins, wherein He has exposed the danger of false security, gave utterance to the parable of the talents, wherein He inculcates the duty of faithfulness. All the subjects of His spiritual kingdom have the same rights and privileges, the same amount of love and care bestowed upon them, the same glorious prospect of an eternal, blissful life before them, but from all is expected that they should do their respective duties towards God and man, not merely in accordance with fixed laws, or prescribed rules, but according to their several abilities. All men are not alike, the capa-

cities and capabilities of the one may, and do, often differ greatly from the other; but all men in a normal, healthy state and condition, are endowed with certain capacities and abilities for action. There are, no doubt, diversities of gifts distributed among men, but all men stand engaged by a solemn obligation towards their God and Creator, to make these various gifts productive of good. The talents, whether five, two, or one, and of whatever nature or quality they may be, must be considered as God's capital given to man, and for the purpose of being faithfully and conscientiously employed, and if thus used will and must increase in proportion. In the parable of the talents, Christ mentions three different persons receiving each a certain sum, stated to have been five, two, and one talent, every man according to his several ability. The one who received five, and the other who received two, are stated to have made the best possible use of them, and increased them in proportion to their amount. They were faithful to the trust committed to them, and when summoned to render an account of their stewardship, their faithfulness was rewarded by a higher trust conferred upon them. The principle then enunciated by Christ, that to every one that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance, thus finds its most reasonable justification. The man, however, who had received but one talent is represented in the parable as a man unfaithful. He had, indeed, not wasted the one talent given to him—perhaps his laziness prevented him from such an exertion. He had, however, not made the least use of it, as he hid it, and justified this, his un-

pardonable negligence, by false and lying excuses. He was wicked as well as slothful, and hence was treated as such, as a man not worthy to be entrusted with anything. He ought to have known that he had to do with a just Master, who required of him only to use his one talent as the others had done with theirs, according to his ability and opportunity. Had he done so, his one talent would have doubled as much as those of the others, and he too would have merited his Lord's approval. He would, like them, have entered into the same eternal joys, and he too would have had his trust renewed and increased; but being wholly untrustworthy, the unused talent was taken from him; "For," says Christ, "from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath."

II. The talent of which Christ speaks in His parable, was a considerable sum of money, varying in amount in different countries. In Palestine a gold talent had the value of £4,500, whilst a silver talent was worth £300. Christ, whilst recognizing the marvellous fact of an unequal distribution of talents or gifts among men, was very anxious that His followers should ever bear in mind what a considerable value even one talent possesses, and that they should be solemnly impressed with the great responsibility they owe to their God. There are diversities of gifts distributed among men, gifts or powers of great value, to some more and to some less, but all the possessors of them have to be animated by the spirit of devotion and faithfulness to the beneficent Giver, and thus make them productive of good. All that man possesses, all he can call his own,

all over which he has the control, are talents or gifts from God, which are not to be hidden, but used to His honour and to the well-being of our fellow-men. All the gifts of nature, all the gifts of providence, and all the gifts of grace, are to be rightly and conscientiously used, according to our abilities and opportunities. Having one day to render an account to the holy and just God as to the manner in which they have been employed, we must expect that He will on no account approve of our having either utterly neglected to use them, or used them for selfish or sinful purposes. Our whole life, all our actions, ought to be sacred ; this is the will of our Creator. We may divide our duties and engagements as either sacred or profane, but no such division is entertained by God, the giver of all gifts, to whom we are ultimately responsible. The man of strong intellect and penetrating mind, the man of a fertile genius and brilliant imagination, the man of vast knowledge and deep erudition, the man of power and position, the man of wealth and influence, and the woman of beauty and gracefulness, of tender sensibility and quiet perception, all are favoured with valuable gifts, with many talents, which ought to be faithfully employed and used in a manner that God, the bountiful Giver, can look upon with complacency and approve of. When one day called upon to render an account to God, the possessor of such gifts should have employed them in such a manner as to expect to hear that he was a good and faithful servant. That men may be solemnly impressed with the value of the gifts bestowed upon them, and with the great responsibility

attached to them, every one, even the poorest and most uncultivated man and woman have been created with the capacity of receiving divine guidance and strength. We mean the religious capacity, the best, highest, and most glorious talent God has bestowed upon mankind. This religious capacity, whereby man receives divine light and truth, whereby he lays hold of God's reconciling and sanctifying love, whereby he is brought in close relationship to his Father in heaven, will ever influence the possessor of many, few, or one talent for good, and impress him with the solemn obligation he stands in to the Giver for the use or abuse of the same. If man's religious capacity is neglected, if all is done to banish God and His Christ from the mind and conscience, and if man acts as if he were not responsible to God for all he does, the best and most brilliant gifts will be a snare and a rock of offence to him. He may receive the applause of his fellow-men, a monument in marble or metal may be raised to him, and his name transmitted to posterity for what he has done, but if irreligious and ungodly, if impure and unhal-
lowed, the gifts have not been employed in the manner required of by God. Not having been in sympathy and harmony with his God, however active he may have been he has, nevertheless, not been faithful to God, and cannot expect to have his trust renewed and increased. Gifts, God's capital invested with man, must be used in the manner in which God wishes them to be used; they ought, indeed, to increase and multiply, but as emanating and belonging to God they should be productive of good in

the sense God takes it. God looks not only on the quantity of the capital increased, but, as the moral governor of the universe, particularly upon the moral quality of man's actions. The gifts of nature and those of providence will increase in right proportions by the faithful employment of them, and they will have their required intrinsic value if our religious faculty is properly cultivated, and in such a manner as made known to us in the Gospels. Man need not be told how he can increase the various and manifold gifts or powers he possesses, for he knows and acts continually on the principle that money makes money, capital rightly invested will bear interest and increase, physical forces, mental and intellectual powers will increase and expand with their cultivation and constant application. Man needs, however, to be constantly exhorted to a right use of the religious capacity whereby all other capacities and powers are influenced and controlled, sanctified and ennobled. As often as we battle against sin, against sinful propensities and temptations, and overcome them victoriously; as often as our self-denial succeeds in subduing selfishness, our faith and hope triumphs over unbelief and doubt, and as often as the love of God conquers the love of the world, as often will our spiritual force and strength increase, "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance."

III. Actions speak louder than words, but inactivity and sloth require words, and often many words, to explain the inexplicable, to justify the unjustifiable. Right, necessary, and useful actions speak for themselves, need no interpretations,

and are the best and surest testimony of a man's real thoughts and intentions. The neglect of duties and obligations, however, as it testifies against a man's behaviour, will necessitate an explanation, which, at the best, will consist in mere excuses. Unfounded excuses again are in reality self-accusations, which have the sentence of condemnation in them. In the parable of the talents, those who faithfully discharged their respective duties, and had conscientiously employed the gifts given to them, and by so doing had doubled them, had only openly and honestly to state the result of this their activity. Lying excuses, and this with an air of humility, were brought forward by the man who wilfully neglected to use the talent given to him. And as in all such excuses, the whole truth was studiously avoided. Some partial truth is in a manner mixed up with falsehood, so as to be entirely lost in it. The wicked and slothful servant brought forward, in justification of his unjust conduct, that he feared God whom he thought too severe and arbitrary in His demands. As he could not think to succeed in satisfying Him, he rather made no use at all of his talent. And is not this the history of many a man and woman, who all their life long go on in fear and trembling at their imaginary divinity, who is represented as a cruel and arbitrary tyrant, whom no man can please and satisfy? And does not this their wrong theology hinder them from making the right use of the talent God has given them, and thus unfit them for the eternal joys of the Lord? What can we do, they exclaim in their false humility, with but one talent? If we had many, if we were so gifted and talented, so learned and

wise, so rich and influential as this or that man or woman, O how active we should be ! But one talent, that is nothing, not worthy much exertion, and it is impossible to make out of it so much as will give satisfaction either to God or to man ! With one talent little or nothing can be done, we will not waste it, but we will hide it and return it at the appointed time. One talent is indeed less than five or two, but is it really nothing, not worth much ? We think it is a very great and precious gift, and such a gift is bestowed on all men, however poor and needy they may be. If we would only rightly cultivate the religious capacity, so as to be united by faith in Christ to our Father in heaven, from whom we derive the power to will and to do what seemeth right and good in His sight, we shall find out what talent we possess, and estimate it at its real value, which is very great, at all events God considers it to be so. Either we are very wicked and do not care to know the value of the one talent we may possess, lest we might be disturbed in our false security, or our theology is utterly at fault, and we really think God to be a hard taskmaster, demanding of man above his strength and ability. Be assured that neither God nor Christ ever require of any man more than he is able to give, but it is expected from all of us that we should act in accordance with our ability and opportunity, allowing ourselves to be influenced and guided by the light and truth of Christ's Gospel, and God's love to be the motive power of all our actions. Let us be in right earnest to do the will of God as made known by Christ the Saviour ; and endeavour to

act in accordance with the principles of His religion, and we shall then know and understand our Father in heaven, and have got rid of our heathenish ideas respecting Him. Remember that we shall one day not be judged by our correct or incorrect creed, but by the godly life we have led ; not by our sanctimonious words, but by our holy, self-denying, humble life ; not by the amount of work we have done, but whether it was done in the Spirit of Christ, and is commensurate with our abilities, opportunities, and privileges. False or erroneous ideas about God and His Christ will, no doubt, have a pernicious influence upon our life and actions, and we are in duty bound to get rid of them, the sooner the better, by meditating on God's Word, but let us not wait with our living and acting as becometh Christians until our doubts and perplexities are removed. "A true theology for yourself is born out of a divine life. To begin with theology is often to end in the wickedness of sloth, in burying all your powers." Time is short, and the responsibility is great. If we do not use our talent to day, it may be taken from us to-morrow, and if we do not increase it, it will diminish or be incapable of any use. Excuses are of no avail and highly criminal where it is our duty to act, and it is our imperative duty to improve our spiritual condition, to be filled with God's love, to have our faith strengthened, our hope made secure, and advance in godliness and holiness. Action, and not words of plausible or wicked excuses, are required of us. Remember the night cometh when no man can work, but may we by the grace of God be enabled to do our respective duty faithfully towards God

and man, and towards ourselves, so that when we are called upon to render an account to our God, we may be welcomed by Him in the words : “Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

XX.

The Grief of an Awakened Conscience.

ACTS XVI. 30-31

"And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

I. Christianity is a religion which is, in the first instance, designed for each individual man as such. In directing its particular attention to every child of Adam, however humble his position in life may be, it has thereby raised the value and importance of every human being. Christ has in several parables set forth the grand object of His divine mission here on earth to be to seek and save, not a lost flock of sheep, not a large amount of money, but the single sheep, the single piece of money. And keeping steadfastly in mind this His great object of life, He was unremitting in search after the individual man, publican or sinner, Pharisee or Sadducee, yea, even the thief on the cross, to make of him a citizen of His kingdom of heaven. His apostles, faithful to their Master's principles, directed their attention also first and foremost to the individual man, wherever they met him on their missionary journeys. They never were dazzled or carried away by mere human greatness or power. Not that

they did not yearn to bring the great, the mighty and noble of this world under the influence of the Gospel, if they could only honestly be reached, but they looked upon every individual who bore the image of man, be he poor or rich, learned or unlearned, as a man standing in need of the saving knowledge of Christ. In bringing one individual after another to Christ, they gradually founded churches and Christianized nations and countries. And ever since their time, Christ's work has only thus been done effectually when each individual man with his spiritual wants, was the object of particular care and attention. On the other hand, wherever the individual was only so much cared for as he helped to swell the number, his individual wants, doubts or perplexities, were little heeded. And when he dared to offer resistance to these wholesale conversionists, worldly power and wisdom were used to force him into obedience against his will and inclination, in spite of his unbelief or doubt respecting the new creed imposed upon him. This was nothing less than spiritual despotism, and as such, it was in flagrant opposition to the spirit and precept of Christ and the teaching and example of His apostles. In Christ's and the apostles' estimation, the individual man that is to be spiritually benefited has to be appealed to to give a fair hearing to the Gospel message, has to be won not by force or intimidations, but by true and sincere conviction of the truth it sets forth. This is such a well known Christian principle as to the mode of making converts to the religion of Christ, that we are greatly surprised that individual Christians should ever have been so foolish as to have

allowed themselves to have a creed imposed upon them, the truth of which they were not convinced of, and which could not be even established as such by an appeal to the Scriptures. If men were truly wise they would on no account allow their individual right and liberty, conferred upon them by Christ, to be interfered with by any presumptuous power, be it political or ecclesiastical. There was nothing of the priest with his presumptions in any of Christ's apostles. They preached faithfully Christ's religion under persecutions, trials and imprisonment, and were rejoicing in their tribulations, if only one poor, struggling, anxious sinner was brought to the Friend of sinners, to the King of spiritual liberty and peace. Such an one the apostle Paul and Silas had won under peculiarly painful and distressing circumstances in the jail at Philippi, a Roman colony, and this was no other than the jailor himself. No doubt a very insignificant person touching his position in society, but nevertheless of great value and importance in Christ's kingdom, and as such the history of his conversion is related with all care, as if he were the greatest personage in the place. And what surprisingly great and important changes were often effected in the world by the addition of such true and humble believers to the fold of Christ! Here in Philippi, the first town in Europe, that now Christianized Europe, the first fruits of the apostle's labours were a woman dealing in purple-dyed goods and a jailor! Lydia, the purple dealer, was won to Christ in all quietness, but the jailor under great commotion in the town. The apostle Paul and Silas were expelling the spirit of

divination from a female slave, who by her art brought to her owners much gain. Superstition, besides being degrading to man, is always more expensive than truth divine; for Christ's religion is offered to every one without money and without price; freely it is received, freely it is given. The greedy owners could not brook the idea of losing such a lucrative source of gain through the girl losing the spirit of divination. Their anger was roused against Paul and Silas, and they dragged them to the magistrate, who, in his bewilderment, without even the appearance of a trial, ordered them forthwith to be beaten by the lictor, and sent to prison with the express injunction to keep them in safety. The jailor understood the magistrate well enough, and treated his prisoners with due severity. He threw them into the lower part of the prison, most certainly a dark and dirty hole, and he also had their feet put in stocks, which was a kind of torture. This was the first persecution they suffered from heathen fanaticism, but these servants of God though in prison and smarting under the pain inflicted upon them, were, nevertheless, truly free men, and, as such, could rejoice even in their sufferings. Their very prison they turned into a place of worship, praying, and singing hymns, and this within the hearing and sight of an audience consisting of prisoners, thieves, robbers, and murderers! We are convinced that never before was there witnessed such an extraordinary spectacle in any heathen prison. Every place a true Christian inhabits, be it even a prison, is hallowed ground, a temple, where prayer and praises ascend out of a believing, regenerated, happy, and grateful heart and

soul, to the God of love, comfort, and consolation. Only one man slept during this divine service, and this man's duty was to be awake, but an earthquake shaking the very foundation of the prison loosened the chains of the prisoners, and opened the prison doors. This awoke even the sleeping jailor, and he was terror-stricken at the mere idea of the changes the earthquake may have made in the prison arrangements for which he was responsible. Thinking the prisoners had made their escape, he attempted to commit suicide, but was deterred from doing it by the Apostle Paul, who allayed his fears by the comforting assurance, "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here."

II. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" asked the much agitated jailor of Paul and Silas. We are surprised to hear him asking such a question of them, for it offers a psychological enigma which we have a right to solve if we can, and to our satisfaction. How did the man come to direct such a question, and in such a precise and correct form? In the narrative of his conversion nothing of his antecedents is mentioned, in fact, we know only that he acted to the very letter of his instructions respecting the prisoners. And even, if after securing them, he fell asleep instead of watching them, this can be excused on reasonable grounds, for nature maintaining her rights proves often more powerful than our will and best intentions. Tired and exhausted, he may have been overpowered by sleep. Furthermore, that he, on being rudely awakened by the noise and clamour consequent on the earthquake, and fearing that the prisoners, for whose security he was held

responsible, had made their escape, thought of committing suicide ; this, as a heathen, he did not consider to be a crime. It is only since Christianity has revealed the sacredness and responsibility of life, that we consider it as a great crime, if done merely to escape some temporal punishment, or the exposure of a disgraceful act. The question then remains : How did the jailor come to direct such a question and in such a correct form to Paul and Silas when he was already assured by ocular demonstration that none of the prisoners had escaped, although the doors of the prison were thrown open ? There is hardly any doubt that the jailor may have heard that the female slave was for some days running after them, exclaiming : “ These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation.” How this damsel came to know this, and whether sincerely meant by her or not, will ever remain a mystery. Enough, she did make this statement for several days, and it is probable the talk in the town may have reached even the ears of the inquisitive jailor. And it must have been known to him that the apostle did expel the spirit of divination from the girl, for this was the real cause of the persecution raised against them and which brought them into his custody. And by this act they confirmed, in the eyes of the heathens, the statement of the damsel, that they were endowed with such extraordinary power by the Most High God, whose servants they were, and as such commissioned to show men the way of salvation. We may be sure that Paul and Silas, when delivered into the hands of the jailor, and smarting under the wounds inflicted upon

them by the lictor, and the pain they were suffering in having their feet put into the torturous stocks, spoke of the suffering of the Saviour, the innocent for the guilty, the just for the unjust, that we might thereby be saved. And when the earthquake occurred, opening the prison doors through which the prisoners might have escaped easily, if they felt disposed so to do, he became convinced of the truth of one part of the girl's statement, viz. : that they were servants of the Most High God, and that He had interfered on their behalf. And he reasoned further, that if these men are really God's servants, they will show him, as they say, the way of salvation. What he had heard, what he had seen in the whole demeanour of the prisoners, who bore their suffering with Christian fortitude and cheerfulness, spoke so forcibly to his heart and conscience, that in the anguish of his awakened soul, he asked these servants of God the momentous question, "What must I do to be saved?" Thus the persecuted servants of God, or rather Christ's cause for which they were treated so shamefully, gained a glorious victory. The first battle of Christianity with heathenism in Europe resulted in a victory won by Christ. The struggle which had commenced in a jail, lasted during the first three centuries, during which time heathenism, upheld and supported by Roman power, was warred against and at last conquered.

III. "What must I do to be saved?" This is the cry of an awakened conscience on realizing its false position towards God. The history of religion is the history of such cries after reconciliation with God. The history of man's

spiritual struggles dates from the very time when man first lost his innocency ; and as long as man will remain as he is, viz. : created for God and eternity, and yet acting against God and exposing himself to the danger of losing eternal life, such a momentous question an awakened soul and conscience will ask. Man can, alas ! and often does act thus, against his best and lasting interests, and he can and does do violence to his conscience in lulling it to sleep by diversions and amusements, by busying himself about everything except the spiritual wants of his soul. But often in spite of all his efforts to stifle and suppress the soul's cry, it will make itself heard and painfully felt. A disquieted soul, an awakened conscience, will not rest until it has found rest and peace in God's love. Outward adverse circumstances, inward disquietude and restlessness, will ring from the troubled soul the cry : " What must I do to be saved ? " *Saved*, from what ? From sin and guilt, from fear and anxiety, from doubt and perplexity, from a degrading superstition and tyrannizing priesthood, from a false philosophy and soul-destroying materialism—in fact, man needs to be saved from everything that can bring him into opposition to his God, through which he endangers his eternal well-being. Ever since man in the anguish of his awakened soul felt the need of being saved, his ingenuity has been employed to find out the means and ways by which it can be effected. He has done all he could, all that was demanded of him to do by the wisest and best of men, by those who made it an especial object of study, to find out means to satisfy this craving of his soul, but whether

it has ever truly satisfied a soul where Christianity is not known and accepted, we will not pass an opinion. So much is certain, that whilst the history of heathenism confirms the fact that at all times the awakened conscience has cried aloud: "What must I do to be saved?" it at the same time convinces us that the means used to meet men's spiritual need was too often degrading to man's dignity and as such could not possibly be of much use to him. It could not be otherwise, for, if man is to be the sole guide and teacher in such matters to his fellow-man, the blind would be leading the blind and both must fall into the ditch. The universal cry of struggling man cannot be directed to any particular man however ingenious and talented, however learned or wise he may be, for he is nevertheless but a man of like passion, sin, and failings as the rest of his fellow-men. This universal cry for salvation is in reality and truth directed to the Lord of the universe, and ascends to heaven, and from Him came the answer pointing us to the One whom He had sent into the world to save man, with the express injunction; "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him!" Ever since this revelation of God's will and purpose respecting man's spiritual well-being, the awakened sinner can and ought to know what he is to do to be saved; and if he does as bidden, his soul will find that peace, hope, and joy it craves after. You disquieted and disturbed souls, you ask in all sincerity and earnestness, "What must I do to be saved?" From heaven, from your merciful and compassionate Father comes the answer: "Hear ye Him," Jesus the Saviour of mankind! And what

is it He tells us? What is it He requires of us? Hear His gracious invitation in the soul-comforting words: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You are anxious to be brought into close relationship to your Father in heaven. Hear the beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased, when He gives you the firm assurance: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." You are in doubt and perplexity about your eternal destiny, even whether there is an eternity of bliss or woe at all, for you have heard materialistic philosophers asserting that there is no eternal future for you, and that the grave is the miserable end you have to look forward to. You have heard this revolting opinion advocated, which wounds your feelings and is calculated to drive you almost to despondency. Hear then Him, who came from heaven, and went again to His and our Father, in what a solemn and reassuring manner He says: "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die." Christ, then, satisfies all the real, spiritual wants of an awakened man. Man may advance in art, science and knowledge, but his spiritual wants will ever remain the same as they have been. Hence whenever the awakened conscience will direct to heaven the question, "What must I do to be saved?" there will ever be the one and same answer returned from our merciful Father in heaven: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

XXI.

The Gradual Development of Christ's Kingdom.

MARK IV. 26-30.

"And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come. And He said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?"

I. The parable which is to engage our attention is the only one which is peculiar to St. Mark. Short as it is, it has called forth a variety of opinions among expositors and divines respecting some of its peculiar traits. The kingdom of God, that kingdom Christ founded here on earth, and of which He is the supreme Head and Authority, is in this parable likened to a man who should cast seed into the ground, etc. We all know that before the husbandman begins to sow he has first of all to select a ground suited to the purpose, and carefully to prepare it for the seed. When the seed is scattered, the work of the husbandman for the time ends. He has entrusted the seed to the ground, and the rain, sun and other natural influences necessary, will do their work to quicken the seed, that it grows and developes first the blade, then the ear, and afterward the full corn in the ear. Whilst this growing process is going on the agriculturist can direct his attention to other duties incumbent upon him, work by day and rest by night. As it is entirely out of his power to accelerate the growth of the

seed sown, having no authority over the laws of nature, he is obliged to wait in patient expectation for the ripening of the seed into fruit. It would therefore be more than folly on his part, were he every now and then to yield to his curiosity to investigate the nature of the growth itself. Whilst thus vainly endeavouring to find out the secret of life and growth of the plant, he would at the best only succeed in killing the life itself. When he has done his duty towards the ground and the seed, he has to leave the growth to natural causes, forces and influences. The precious treasure he has committed to the earth will be returned to him in harvest time increased to a hundred or a thousand fold. The earth, it is said in the parable, bringeth forth fruit of itself, no doubt meant to convey to us the idea that, as it is in her bosom the seed quickens, it is also sustained there throughout all the phases of its development to fruit. When the fruit is brought forth, it is then again that the labour of the husbandman is required, in cutting the corn, binding the golden sheaves together, and bringing them with joy and thankfulness into the garner. Thus far the plain story of the parable, but it was not given us to understand it in its literal meaning, for a parable has, and is meant to have, a spiritual significance, setting forth religious or moral truth. What, then, is the truth Christ has embodied in this parable? He introduced it with the express purpose of illustrating in some adequate manner some important truth respecting the nature and purport of His kingdom, the kingdom of God. We must, however, not expect that this parable should contain in

symbolical language the whole truth respecting this kingdom, for Christ has on various occasions uttered other parables bearing reference to the same subject. In others He has, for instance, plainly enough stated who is and was the chief sower of the imperishable seed of His Gospel. We are of opinion that in the parable under discussion He brings forward the necessity and importance of human agency in promoting His kingdom here on earth. The Word of God, Christ's words, which are spirit and life, these are the precious seeds believing men, ministers or evangelists, young and old, are in faith and hope to throw into the hearts and consciences of men. They are not to be too anxious or eager as to the effect produced upon the men thus benefited. It is for them faithfully and hopefully to sow the divine seed, and the showers of God's Spirit, as well as the Sun of Righteousness will awaken it to life, so as gradually to transform the whole inner man to newness of life, character and disposition, bearing precious spiritual fruit. The seed, we are assured, will grow under God's blessing by night and day, through showers and sunshine, through storms and quiet. Nothing will be able to hinder its growth and development, if it has once fallen on good and susceptible ground. It will, by virtue of its inward life-giving power, in consequence of the divine influence upon it, gradually and perhaps imperceptibly grow and develop, first into the blade, then into the ear, and after that into the full corn in the ear, thus developing into a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. The parable then sets forth the quiet and certain growth and develop-

ment of the seed of the Gospel in the heart of man, which is sown by believing workers. As the individual member of Christ's kingdom is thus growing, His kingdom of light, truth and righteousness will grow and extend far and near, until the glorious era will dawn upon the human race, when there will be one Shepherd and one fold, one bond of common brotherhood uniting the children of one common Father in heaven, and peace and goodwill to each other will make human life truly happy and contented, and thus turn this earth of ours into a paradise.

II. We live in a remarkable age, in which we seem to advance with gigantic strides. The advancement of knowledge and science, the startling discoveries and inventions, which have completely revolutionized our social life; the liberal political institutions which give free scope to individual and national development, in fact all that this remarkable century has brought to life and existence, characterize it as the age of unparalleled progress and advancement. We cannot wonder that, inflated with such extraordinary success, we should hear the children of this 19th century boasting loudly: "We have made ourselves a name! We are great and powerful!" There is no doubt that man does manifest his greatness and power in his reasonable activity. He has certainly accomplished already great and marvellous things, and there is still enough scope for him on this his path of progress. Man has indeed cause to congratulate himself for what he has accomplished, and he can take fresh courage to go on in unremitted exertions to make this life more tolerable and comfortable. We would

not be so childish as to begrudge him the reasonable enjoyment of the fruit of his labour, nor would we be so unreasonable as to counsel him to stop on the road of progress, to rest with quietude on his won laurels. On the contrary, in concert with all sober and intelligent men, we would encourage him to move on with firm and confident steps, and will rejoice with him when success crowns his unremitted efforts. Activity is life, and real progress characterizes this life as being in a healthy condition. We would only counsel our fellow-men not to become proud, arrogant and overbearing, and above all not to forget Christ's salutary warning, when He says: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Alas! a great many even learned and talented, intoxicated with our modern progress, make this world their sole and exclusive care, and scorn the idea to give heed to Christ's admonition. Their chief aim and object in life seems to be to gain this world and lose their soul. But allow me to ask in all quietness: Can man by all his ingenuity and wisdom, by all his speculations and exertions, really gain this world? Is all he has already gained pure and refined gold without any alloy? Can he even enjoy undisturbed all the advantages he has gained for himself in his progress? Has he with his advancement gained peace and happiness, and has he succeeded in spreading it? On all these and similar questions to which the modern optimist without God and Christ, without religion and godliness, is loath to give a true answer, the answer is given him by his antagonist, the modern pessimist, as ungodly and irreligious as he. Does

the optimist enjoy dwelling with complacency and satisfaction on the sunny side of his modern achievements, it is the pessimist, who with sneers and jeers, with bitter and vehement irony and reproaches exposes the paradise he has created for himself as being a golden cage, yea a madhouse. The pessimist, directing his attention almost exclusively to all that is bad, hollow and spurious in man, in societies and communities, has no difficulty in bringing a long register of accusations against all modern institutions and principles, against men in power and authority, against men of wealth and influence. He complains that the military budget absorbs by far the largest share of the national revenues, and that the legislature is every year wasting a considerable time in discussing new schemes for finding out new resources to satisfy the exchequer. He denies the existence of a free press or a really true and genuine public opinion. We have, he says, party journals, and party opinions expressed and vindicated in them. Knowledge and science, a general education and enlightenment, from which the optimist promises himself heaven on earth, the golden era of men being like God, knowing to distinguish between good and evil, between right and wrong, between truth and error, meet with strong scepticism on the part of the pessimist. He does not believe that the spread of knowledge, often of a very doubtful character, will ever accomplish that so sanguinely expected it would. The stern realities of life, the struggle for mere existence, becoming always more and more hard and bitter, does not allow the mass of people time to read the books and journals written for them. As to modern discoveries and

inventions, the pessimist, whilst acknowledging their importance and usefulness, believes that only a few favoured of heaven derive the largest benefit from them. The large mass of people are on the whole placed by these in a worse position than they have ever been before. They have made labour cheap, and capital all powerful, hence the modern social struggle between labour and capital. It is not here the place to discuss this much vexed question, and so we pass on and allow the pessimist to proceed with a few more of his laments over modern society. He has many complaints to make against our social life. The God of this world, the great idol called Mammon, has more devoted worshippers, than Jehovah ever had. At his shrine are daily sacrificed man's honour, peace and happiness. The votaries of Mammon do not scruple to rear their temples on the ruins of others. Pleasure and enjoyment, refined or coarse, are sought after with an avidity as if they were man's highest good in life. We live in an age of false appearances. A great many live more or less if not beyond their means, certainly quite up to them. Beneath the outward glittering appearance there is often misery and wretchedness hidden. Our much boasted age is an age of outward show, an age of woe, dissatisfaction and restlessness, and it would have been better not to have been born. Let us then, exclaims the melancholy and desponding pessimist, advance as fast as we can, exhaust all our strength and energies, that the whole of the human race may the sooner die, and sink into the dark, eternal night of nothingness. Such are some of the prevailing opinions and sentiments entertained by our

modern pessimists, whose number is not so small as we may think.

III. The kingdom of this world, whether viewed from the side of the optimist or from that of the pessimist, will always present much that is either for or against the one or the other of these two schools of social philosophy. Both together represent man and society not altogether such as they are, for both exaggerate. It is indeed not all gold that glitters, as the optimist would fain have us to believe, but, on the other hand, it is not all so desperately wicked as the morose pessimist describes it to be. As believing Christians, however, our sympathy is, in the main, not with the pessimist, but with the optimist, and this on a totally different ground from his. As believing Christians, we are citizens of the kingdom of God, which from an apparently small and insignificant beginning, has gradually been growing and developing, extending far and near, and this in spite of the most violent and virulent opposition ever raised against the rise and progress of a new religion. And this kingdom of God, which Christ has established, and of which He is the King, is a kingdom of light and truth, of righteousness and holiness, of peace, love, joy and hope. As all men without distinction of race or colour, without distinction of age, rank or position, are called to become members of this divine kingdom, the principle of equality is maintained. As all men are, by faith and allegiance to the Divine King, united to each other by the bond of that divine love which unites them to their King, the principle of fraternity is vindicated. As all men have the free choice left them,

whether to become a citizen of this kingdom or not, the principle of liberty is recognized. As all the members of Christ's kingdom are required to strive after moral perfection, the principle of true and genuine advancement of the human race is believed in and encouraged. All this may appear to superficial thinkers an utopian scheme, that can never be realized here on earth, but why should the same principles be able to be realized, as believed, in political kingdoms and not also in the moral kingdom, the kingdom of Christ? We believing Christians hold fast to our hope in the ultimate realization of the kingdom of God based and upheld by these principles. Christ has founded this His kingdom, in spite of opposition and persecution, yea, in the face of a cruel and degrading death. He has also given us the assurance that even through His ignominious death on the cross, the apparent defeat of His life-spent labour, He will draw all men to Him, make them members of His kingdom, and thus triumph over all His foes. This kingdom has already been nearly two thousand years established, and much as it has extended, and much as it has already accomplished for man, it cannot be said that it stands before us complete in all its glory, as the Divine King has designed that it will one day be. There are enough nations and peoples still to be conquered, enough masked or open enemies still to be subdued, enough error and superstition still to be uprooted, and selfishness, sin and evil still to be overcome, before the kingdom of God can be realized as the all-prevailing power over man. The apostles and the early Christians were so sanguine as to its success that they believed it would be complete in their day. These

faithful sowers of the divine seed, the Word of God, had to go to their eternal rest and leave to succeeding generations the same work to do, to sow the seed of the Gospel, and this often at the risk of their lives. Those that sow in tears will reap in joy, may be said of all sowers, especially of those sowers in our days. The sowing of the precious seed seems every day a more difficult task, on account of the many oppositions it meets on all sides, and the worst feature in this respect is, the growing impatience and restlessness of the sower himself. Hardly have we scattered the seed in the hearts of men, when curiosity prompts us to see whether it has already sprung up, and is even already fruit-bearing, and when we cannot see any visible result, we are cast down and lose heart to go on with the sowing. We forget that a work of faith must begin and be carried on in faith and hope, and in the spiritual kingdom there are also laws which have to be respected. In our parable Christ gives us clearly enough to understand, that respecting the ripening of His spiritual seed into fruit, the laws are the same as those which regulate the growth and development of the natural seed, viz. : first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear. And such gradual development requires time, often more than we allow. How far the kingdom of God has already advanced towards its final completion, and how long we have still to wait for this glorious era, is very difficult to say. "It is not for you," says Christ, "to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in His own power." We have first of all to see that the kingdom of God is within us, and we have, as believing Christians, faith-

fully to sow the seed under sunshine or storm, at all times and seasons, and this with the cheerful and confident hope that it will be quickened, grow and develop, and ripen to fruit. Be then a true and faithful member of Christ's kingdom, a Christian optimist, as you have every reason and encouragement to be. Rejoice not in iniquity, but in the truth, of whatever nature and kind it may be, for only truth can make man truly free. Be a Christian optimist and promote everything that can enhance man's real happiness and well-being for time and eternity. Be a Christian optimist and sow in faith Christ's precious seed entrusted to you, for by so doing thy daily prayer to God: "Thy kingdom come," will in God's appointed time be answered in the joyful announcement: "All things are subdued unto him, our King and Lord, and God is all in all."

XXII.

Godliness Profitable unto All Things.

I TIMOTHY IV. 8.

"For bodily exercise profiteth little : but Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

I. St. Paul exhorted the deacon Timothy to refuse to "give heed to profane and old wives' fables," and rather exercise himself in godliness or piety. He was anxious to impress him with the earnestness and solemnity of a Christian life, which ought not to be diverted from its high and noble vocation by such absurd fictions. The Christian teacher or layman, Paul meant, ought to be on his guard not to give credit to those fables or myths which are palmed on the ignorant as truths or facts. Such fables, if ingenious in their invention, and skilful in their representation, may afford amusement to young and old, and if a moral is deduced from them, may be useful as well as entertaining. If, however, such fables are propagated as historical facts, chosen as the vehicle to spread lying fabrications by designing men, in order to mislead the unsuspecting, as was the case with these heretical productions, we can well understand Paul's anxiety on Timothy's account. Such fables are dangerous to young and old, for they bring into discredit real history and deter man from paying due attention and reverence to saving knowledge and truth. Instead of wasting his time and strength on such fables or myths, Timothy is

exhorted rather to exercise himself in godliness or piety. Even bodily exercise, good and necessary as it is, compared to the exercise of godliness, is of little account, because "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." It is important to note that the apostle does not say that we should have no bodily exercise, for he knew as well as we do that man requires such exercise for the good of his health. He does not say, as our A.V. has it, that "bodily exercise profiteth little," but he does say, that its profit is to a small extent in comparison to the profitableness of the exercise of godliness which extends to all things, including even our bodily well-being, and has not only the promise of this life, but also that of the life to come, when our bodies shall have returned to dust.

"Exercise thyself in godliness, which is profitable unto all things," this was the apostle's advice to Timothy. A very important advice to every Christian, be he bishop or deacon, minister or layman, and it is in the power of every believing Christian to bear testimony to the apostle's conviction, that godliness is in reality and truth profitable unto all things. It is very significant that the apostle did not advise the deacon to exercise himself in being religious, but in godliness. The words are indeed synonymous and often used promiscuously, as if there were no difference at all between them, but yet the apostle, as we believe, has, for very good reason chosen designedly and correctly *godliness* in preference to *religion*. It is a fact that nowhere in the Bible you will find that it is required of man to be religious,

nor is man praised for being religious, and wherever the word religion or religious does occur, it is always in connection with something not approved of. This may perhaps startle some of you, but it is not the less true and can be verified by all of you consulting a concordance. Only one time is it employed in a favourable sense, and this in the epistle of St. James, but even there it was deemed necessary to attach to it two weighty and important adjectives. We mean the sentence beginning with : "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is to visit the fatherless," etc., which follows the exposition and condemnation of persons, who "seem to be religious and bridle not their tongues, deceiving their own heart," and whose religion is considered "vain" or useless. To be truly religious is the result of godliness, the outward manifestation of it, and if not, such religion is vain, lacking the life and power of it. The outward must be the true and faithful expression of the inward, was St. James's opinion. Then the word religion is used by the Apostle Paul, and this not at all in a commendatory manner. As a Jew under the teaching and influence of Pharisaism he could boast of having "profited in the Jews' religion above many of his equals in his own nation," and yet in spite of all this, he was fighting against God's purposes with man, and persecuting believing Christians. And like him his countrymen, many of whom could with equal right boast of having profited by their religion, and manifesting much zeal for it, did nevertheless persecute and put to death Christ, the Saviour. A man, then, can be religious without being godly ; can be active and

zealous for the cause of his religion, and be intolerant, fanatic, and persecuting. And does not the history of the Church substantiate this sad fact? And does not our own personal experience confirm it? Is it not true that men can be regular in their attendance at religious worship, loud in their profession of religion, have a correct knowledge of the principles and teaching of religion, be zealous for the spread of it, and yet be utter strangers to Christian godliness or piety. We may live in an age called religious, where religion and its teachers are respected, churches and societies increase in number, and yet after all ungodliness prevail. We repeat it again, the Bible never demands of a man to be *religious*, but to be *godly*; for the very reason that there are false religions, and the motives for being religious may often be selfish and impure. Tell an intelligent infidel to be religious, and the very name will awaken within him thoughts and feelings opposed to it, but tell him to be godly, and if he is still a true man, honestly striving after moral perfection, he cannot possibly reproach you for proffering him such a reasonable and necessary advice. Tell him to be godly and he will at once know that you advise him to be godlike. "And godliness," says the Apostle Paul, "is profitable unto all things."

II. "Exercise thyself in godliness or piety, which is profitable unto all things," this was Paul's injunction to Timothy. The word the apostle uses for godliness or piety signifies in the Greek the manner of thinking and acting resulting from obedience and reverence towards the gods, towards parents, towards elder persons, persons in authority and others

deserving them. Paul, then, meant that Timothy should exercise himself in obedience and reverence towards the living and loving God, the same as dutiful children render to their loving parents. And requiring of him, and from all believing Christians, such obedience and reverence, he was well aware that he and they are, or ought to be, actuated by the strongest possible motive in doing this ; for God is their Father ; who has loved them with an everlasting love in Christ Jesus. Not fear and trembling should constrain them to obey and revere Him against their will and inclination, as if God was a despot or tyrant, an unknown deity stern and unrelenting ; but the love of their Heavenly Father towards them should awaken in them an earnest desire to please Him in all things. Christianity, and Christianity alone of all the known and existing religions, requires man to stand in filial relation to his Father in heaven, and has made it possible for him to love Him with a pure heart fervently. The Christian, by faith in God's redeeming love, is placed in filial relation to his God, and exercises himself constantly in filial obedience and reverence towards Him, and love alone is the all-powerful motive for so doing. The exercising of the Christian in godliness or piety has for its aim and object, to come always nearer and closer to his God, to obey more readily and cheerfully His voice in all things, to be humble and submissive to His will, and thus become always more like Him, more perfect in purity and holiness, more *godly* or *godlike*. And this, the believing Christian's filial relation to his Heavenly Father, this, his childlike disposition and feeling towards Him, will and must influence his thoughts and actions.

This was what Paul had in mind when he recommended Timothy to exercise himself in godliness, and it is this which the religion of Christ ever requires of all its faithful adherents. The filial relation the believing Christian stands in to his God is to influence and control all his thoughts and actions, and having the law of God written on the tables of his renewed heart, he will be a law to himself, requiring no Christian Pharisee to work out for him a code of laws. And wherever such relation is really existing, Christian men and women will be influenced in their thoughts and actions so that their whole life will be a testimony to the love of God in Christ shed abroad by the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Being godly they will be religious, true followers of Christ, meek and lowly of heart, and breathing love and goodwill towards all men, But there is, alas ! a spurious piety, a sanctimonious outward display of godliness, lacking its inward vital power, and this brings Christianity into discredit among those who are strangers to it. And we hear then, to our greatest surprise and dismay, that Christianity is not only not profitable, but even the greatest obstacle to man's progress and advancement, the greatest insult to man's dignity, as it is contrary to reason and even common sense, We are convinced that however true this may be in reference to a spurious piety or godliness, it is a base calumny in reference to true piety as required by the religion of Christ, and consisting in man's union with God by the bond of love. Christianity never requires of man a blind belief, a faith contrary to reason and devoid of all evidence. The Christian's faith in God's love cannot possibly have the tendency

to be contrary to sound reason, which is the noblest gift God has bestowed upon us, and it cannot be God's purpose to counteract the lawful working of man's mind, by which He is recognized and honoured. By his union with his God the Christian's reason is enlightened and controlled, since man's reason can and does err. And can it be considered humiliating or interfering when God graciously condescends to enlighten our limited powers of reason, subject to error or falsehood? The believing Christian's affections are purified and sanctified by God's love, so that out of a regenerated and thankful heart pure and unselfish acts arise, an honour and praise to God and a blessing to others. The whole inner man in his mysterious union with God through the power of His forgiving love is renewed and sanctified, influenced and controlled so as to be enabled to think and act rightly, and thus receive his Heavenly Father's approval and support. This is the believing Christian's exercise in godliness or piety of which St. Paul reminds us. And if sincerely and honestly persevered in will put to shame and confusion all those who reproach Christian faith as being contrary to reason, and Christian piety as encouraging hypocrisy or formalism. Christian piety or godliness is a renewed and sanctified life, born of God, living in harmony with Him, and being actuated and influenced by holy love, by His Holy Spirit. And we have still to learn that such a life is unreasonable, or that it is not man's paramount duty to live such a life, and aspire after that moral perfection which he is capable of reaching by God's grace. "Exercise thyself in godliness," is the advice given to believing Christians.

III. "Godliness is profitable unto all things," this was Paul's conviction, and will no doubt be confirmed by all those who, like him, feel the renewing power of God's love. He will, however, be reproached by some as favouring the principles of utilitarianism, in holding out the strongest inducement possible for being godly or pious by declaring that "it is profitable, and having not only the promise of the life that now is, but also of that which is to come." Philosophers entertaining anti-utilitarian principles would disagree with the apostle's statement, and say, if godliness or piety is man's duty, than he ought to practise it, not only independent of every inducement, but even in the face of every disadvantage. The discharge of duty of whatever kind or description it may be, they would argue, carries with it or rather finds already every satisfaction in the very act itself, and no doubt those that reason thus are so far right. In the discharge of duty the true man has already all the reward he claims. And we need not stay to reason that it is man's paramount duty to love God with his whole heart and soul, and thus loving Him, he will be obedient to Him in all things, willingly and cheerfully. He will in fact exercise himself in that godliness required of him, without being told that it is profitable. And we may also say that Christianity, on closer inspection, does *not* favour utilitarian principles, such as could be objected to as holding out an inducement for doing that which is man's duty to do without it. Man's merits, his righteousness, the practice of every Christian virtue, even his dying as a martyr to his religious conviction and for the cause of Christianity, will not procure his salvation. "By

grace," says the apostle, "are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." It is our duty to receive God's gracious gift of salvation, and live by faith in the Son of God who has washed us and redeemed us from all our sins, and thus exercise ourselves in godliness, and yet the apostle distinctly tells us, that "godliness or piety is profitable unto all things!" And we, like him, are often obliged to make the same statement, not only to infidels, but also to professed Christians, and in doing this we have as little intention as he had to use Jesuitically wrong or disapproved-of means in order to gain a good and laudable result. Like the apostle, we too hear from infidels that Christian godliness or piety, however good it may be in gaining the other world, certainly is the most unprofitable thing in this our present world, interfering with almost everything man undertakes to promote his own and others' well-being. And again, many religious people orthodox in creed and no doubt well-meaning, have such dark and gloomy views of life that they would narrow man's sphere of usefulness, and begrudge him every innocent pleasure and enjoyment. These mistaken people lay down rules as to what man is to do or shun, as if they were under the law of Moses. And alas! unknowingly they and their doings give the infidel a plausible plea for decrying Christian piety as being in the way of man's progress and culture. We who are conscious of an habitual life in God's love and exercise ourselves constantly in godliness, have to refute all such false accusations by the plain statement that godliness, if real and vital as required of us, is nevertheless profitable

unto all things. We need not to add that sin and all that leads to it is and must be excepted from this rule, for godliness or piety is a living and walking in and with our Holy Father in heaven, not spasmodically but habitually. And thus living a godly life, which is our most reasonable service, we shall experience that such a life will, in all positions and circumstances of whatever nature or condition, possess advantages of which the ungodly or impious, the hypocrite or formalist, have not the least conception. Having one's life hid with Christ in God, standing in filial relation to Him, deriving divine light and strength, comfort and support, peace and joy from Him, we shall be honest and truthful, industrious and useful, happy and contented, courageous and hopeful, loving and sympathizing, in fact the further we advance in godliness the nearer we shall come to the perfect stature of manhood in Christ Jesus. And such godliness will prove to us profitable even in such things as seem to the inexperienced to have not the least connection with it, it will even conduce to our bodily health. In exercising ourselves in Christian godliness we shall avoid unnecessary cares and worries, the wild and unreasonable chase after this world's goods or pleasures. Taking care not to disturb or do violence to our Christian conscience, and having faith, hope and love towards God, we shall be in a happy and peaceful frame of mind and disposition, which will and must benefit the body, as every physician can tell us. "Godliness *is* profitable unto all things" in riches or poverty, in high or low position, in our study, in our business, or in the workshop, in the bustle and turmoil of life, or in the enjoyment of

rest and recreation, in health or sickness, at the grave of those we love or in the face of our own dissolution, for it is an habitual life in God, from whence we derive all blessings comfort and support. And such a godly and holy life is already heaven here on earth and a foretaste of that life which is to follow, that endless life of bliss. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Amen.

XXIII.

Origin and Importance of the Name Christian.

ACTS XI. 26.

"And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."

I. What would have become of Christianity had it remained within the narrow confines of Palestine, is a question which suggests itself to us when we learn the slow progress it made there during the first years of its existence. When reading the first pages of its early history, this question naturally arises and stimulates us to find an appropriate answer. There is little doubt had Christianity not been carried to other countries and nations it could never have realized its mission as purposed by its divine Founder. It would, probably, have remained in connection with the Jewish religion then prevailing, differing from it only in the one important point, that the Messiah had already come. It would have been a Jewish sect, and perhaps in the course of time entirely suppressed by the all-powerful and dominant Pharisaical party. Even if we allow that the apostles were conscious of the universal character of Christ's religion, yet their Jewish prejudices were so strong that for some years they had religious scruples as to preaching the gospel to Gentiles. After years of struggles against these Jewish prejudices, Peter had to be convinced by a

vision that "of a truth, I perceive," as he said, "that God is no respecter of persons," and acting on this new conviction he baptized the Roman centurion with his household. Christianity, then, if it is to realize its universal mission, and go forth free and independent of the trammels of Pharisaical Judaism, according to its inherent divine power, must first of all be carried beyond the borders of Palestine, and find a centre from which it could spread. Jerusalem would have been the legitimate centre from which the religion of Christ could have proceeded on its divine mission among men, had the Jewish nation embraced it as they were in duty to their covenant God bound to do; but refusing to accept it, and manifesting bitter hostility towards it and its adherents, a new centre had to be found. When Peter overcame his religious prejudices respecting the admittance of the Gentiles into the Church of Christ, and while Paul was preparing himself in his native place, Tarsus, for the work before him, two Hellenistic Jews, whom the persecution drove away from Palestine, made their way to Antioch, preaching to the Gentiles there the Lord Jesus. The result was in every respect different from similar exertions among the Jewish people in the Holy Land, for "a great number," it is said, "believed and turned unto the Lord." The first Gentile Church was thus established, the new centre found, from which the Christianizing of the world could be undertaken, and soon commenced when Paul and Barnabas were called to Antioch to visit the scene of such surprising success. The new centre gained was in

every respect suitable. Antioch was a large and flourishing city, situated on the river Orontes, about eight miles from the sea, and a centre of commercial intercourse between eastern and western nations. It was formerly the capital of the great kings of Syria, and at the time Christianity was introduced it was the residence of the Roman governor of the province which bore the same name. In importance and grandeur it was considered to be equal to Alexandria, and had only to yield the palm to Rome—the then metropolis of the world; but it was, nevertheless, an oriental Rome. The Seleucides, the founders of the city, vied with each other to embellish it, and successive Roman emperors adorned it with magnificent palaces, temples, theatres, statues, etc. It was the Eastern centre of Greek fashion, Roman luxury, and oriental licentiousness. Not far from the city was the famous park called Daphne, where there were the temples of Apollos and Diana, the principal resort of pleasure. The inhabitants were Greeks and Syrians; among the latter were many Jews, who had settled here from the time of its foundation, three hundred years before the Christian era. All was found in Antioch that could reasonably be expected from a city of such magnitude and importance; and to this may be added a splendid situation, a charming climate, a luxurions vegetation, a rich supply of water gushing forth from the rocks, but only man was vile. A well-known modern writer describes the inhabitants of the city, on the strength of reliable information, thus:—“There was a very large number of braggarts, charlatans, mimics, magicians, fortune-tellers, sorcerers, cheating priests. It

was a city given to races, to gambling, to dancing, to processions, fetes, and bacchanalian excesses. There was to be found among them an overmastering passion for luxury, all oriental follies, a most degrading superstition and fanatical licentiousness." In fact, the populace was, on the whole, characterized as being volatile, light-hearted, changeable, riotous, and addicted to many other vices. And yet among these people a great many were turned unto the Lord, and among them the first Gentile Church was established. What made these frivolous and licentious people at once so seriously disposed? Was an earthquake, which often terrified the city, the cause of such a marvellous change? for about the time the conversion of so many inhabitants had taken place, an earthquake had really done much damage to the city, and very naturally disturbed the minds of the people. It may possibly have made them more disposed to pay due attention to the most serious subject ever brought before them, than they in ordinary times would have been; but the preaching of Christ crucified proved also to them to be "the power of God and the wisdom of God."

II. In Antioch Christ's followers were first called Christians, is the brief statement considered important to be transmitted to posterity. A mere name may seem uninteresting, no fit subject to gain much instruction, much less any edification from it. It may be a proper subject for colleges and schools, and of interest to the philologist, historian, or antiquarian, but in the pulpit, where the most serious subjects ought to engage our attention, what is a mere name? And yet, however much we may sometimes

be tempted to speak slightly of a mere name, a name is absolutely necessary for every existing thing and being, for man's thoughts, feelings, and actions, in order to know and distinguish the one from the other. The individual man as such is obliged to bear a name for this very purpose, and nations have from time immemorial adopted a name they preferred to any other, and by which they were recognized. It has always been usual in the schools of philosophy, for those who adopted the opinions advanced in any system of philosophy to take the name of the founder of that system. And the same custom has always prevailed as regards the religious opinions a man professed; he was called after the name the founder bore who taught them. A name is, indeed, an empty sound and of little consequence, if not borne with honour and dignity; and the very thing is missed for which it stands. In such a case, a most honoured name may come into disrepute, and perplex and mislead people who are accustomed to associate with it nobler, purer, and more disinterested thoughts and actions. Take, for instance, the name of Jesuit, derived from the word Jesus, the name our Saviour bore, which would signify one who endeavours to the best of his strength and ability to live such an unselfish, holy, and useful life as He, our Saviour, lived, whom we love and adore. But when the name of Jesuit is mentioned, we at once think, not of Jesus and His principles, but of a body of men, who act on the revolting principle that the end justifies the means. Were they real followers of Jesus, of whom it was said that "He went about doing good," while honouring the

illustrious name they bear, they would have honoured themselves ; but living and acting as they do, in glaring opposition to His example and precept, their name has become a term of reproach. A name chosen by a man in preference to any other is of great use and importance if the bearer of it testifies by his life and actions that he merits this designation. When the religion of Christ was first propagated, those who adopted it as the principle and rule of life, were called by the enemies of the Cross, Galileans, Nazarenes and other names, which they maliciously fastened on them as a reproach, but among themselves they employed names indicative of some one or other trait in their Christian life and character. They were called *saints*, from their purity of life ; *disciples*, from their attachment to the teaching of Christ ; *believers*, from their belief in Him as the Messiah and Saviour ; and *brethren*, from their filial relation to God as their common Father in heaven, and their love to each other as His loving children. All these names, no doubt, were appropriate designations of some important Christian principles, virtues, or graces ; but we know of no other name which would at once so adequately express to friend and foe the intimate relation the professors of Christianity stand in to the Founder of the same, as their leader and chief, their saviour and teacher, their friend and brother, as His own sacred name, and being called *Christians*. Actuated and moved by the same principles and motives, striving and aiming to realize the same object, manifesting and displaying the same love and devotion to true and vital religion, and to the cause of

humanity, as He whom His followers loved, obeyed, and revered, can we wonder that the heathens at Antioch recognized them as belonging to Christ, and as such, worthy to be named after Him? When these new converts separated themselves from their fellow-citizens for conscience sake, deserted the heathen temples, shunned their riotous and immoral festivities, and associated themselves with those who worshipped God in spirit and truth, and endeavoured, by God's sustaining grace, to exemplify, by their walk and conversation, the renewing power of God's love in Christ, their heathen brethren were forced to accede to them that they were Christians indeed, true representatives of Christ. What constituted a true Christian was to be found among these new disciples of Christ, and visible to all, before that name was given which adequately represented what they were in reality, and distinguished them from Pagans and Jews. The two noble and heroic Hellenistic Jews had preached to them "the Lord Jesus" and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord, became Christ's, and were Christians in reality before the name was given.

III. The name Christian that was, ten years after our Lord's ascension, given to the first Gentile converts at Antioch, has ever since been adopted by those nations and individuals who, like them, believed and turned unto the Lord. Wherever Christianity spread the name was retained as correctly representing the believer's close and intimate relation to the Founder of that religion. During the first centuries of the Christian era, when multitudes threw their idols to the moles and to the bats and turned unto the

Lord, they were, as at Antioch, easily recognized as Christians, because they lived separated from the then heathen world, cheerfully made the greatest sacrifices their convictions demanded of them, and led a consistent Christian life. They were Christians in reality, and bore the sacred name with honour. When, however, Christianity became the recognized religion of nations, when professed and protected by emperors and kings, princes and potentates, and established as the religion of the State, we can almost with certainty date from that time the tenacious adherence to the mere name of Christian whilst little of Christ was retained, yea, often much was done that was against His spirit and precept. If all nations and individuals who are called Christians were in reality and truth such as to deserve this name, by a true and genuine Christ-like character and disposition, by purity of thoughts and feelings, by sincere love and devotion to God and humanity, oh, what a happy and peaceful state of society we should have ! We should not hear of war and rumours of war—at least, not among Christians ; we should not hear of sin and vice, of misery and wretchedness, of quarrels and dissensions, of Socialism, Communism, and Nihilism, were all who are called Christians loyal and devoted subjects to Christ, citizens of His heavenly kingdom, and as such, inspired by His Spirit, filled with His love, actuated by His principles and motives, spreading His light and truth. We should already, to a great extent, have realized the prophetic vision of a millenium, were the millions of human beings going by the name of *Christian* really Christ's

devoted and obedient servants. Alas ! this glorious era has hardly commenced. Among the millions who are named after Christ, there are many who are hostile to Him and His requirements ; many who are utterly indifferent as to the solemn duties and obligations the bearing of the name imposes upon them ; many who make void His Word by the traditions of men, misleading them to superstitious and heathenish thoughts and practices ; yea, many, who although well-informed, earnest, and well-meaning, are swayed by an ecclesiastical party spirit, and bite and devour one another. Do not many more or less blaspheme that worthy name by which they are called ? Alas ! they do ; and much mischief is done. Retaining the name of Christ without aspiring to the least resemblance to His character, without breathing His spirit, and manifesting His love and devotion to God and man ; an incalculable injury is done to the cause of religion, to Christ's cause. Besides this, what possible good can it do them to call themselves Christians whilst their own conscience must testify to them that they have in reality nothing in common with Christ ? Is it honest, is it right, would we act thus as honourable men in ordinary life, to bear a name without being that which this name signifies, for which it stands ? It may be pleaded in justification of such, that they have been born, not of Pagan, nor of Jewish, but of Christian parents, have been baptized in this name and confirmed. Plausible as this may appear to the ignorant, it can on no account justify any one to retain the name of Christ without being united with Him by faith and love, identified

with Him in all His plans and intentions, pledged to walk as He walked, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, and striving like Him to do the will of God our Father, and thus be His children. Our parents may be good Christians, may have had us baptized in the name of Christ, and instructed in the teaching and principles of Christianity ; all good and well ; but we have, nevertheless, to come to a personal conviction and faith in Christ ; we have to be born again, or converted unto the Lord, we have "to make our calling and election sure." "As many as received Christ," says John, "to them He gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in His name. Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." This is clear and explicit enough. We do not owe the privilege to be called Christians to our natural birth, to our being born of Christian parents, to our baptism, to our mere knowledge of the contents of the Bible, nor to our belonging to this or that church, but to our personal attachment to Christ, to our obedience to His will, to our being sanctified by His Spirit, to our walking with Him in newness of life, to our having adopted His principles as the rule and conduct of life, and to our aspiring after the happiness of being for ever with the Lord. When we shall thus be united to Christ by a living faith, abide in Him, follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, be Christlike, we shall bear His sacred name with honour, be a blessing in our day and generation, and our names will be written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

XXIV.

The Pharisee and Publican in the Temple.

LUKE XVIII. 9-14.

"And He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

I. The introductory sentence of the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican states the reason for uttering the parable, and thus supplies the key for its correct understanding. It prepares us to expect a severe criticism or exposure of the hidden motives by which certain individuals who surrounded the Saviour were actuated in respect to prayer. Whether these certain individuals, not named and thus severely criticized, belonged to the then very powerful and influential sect of the Pharisees may reasonably be doubted, but there is not a shadow of doubt that the spirit which animated them, the principles they entertained, and the disposition they manifested, were those of the real Pharisee. Pharisaism took its rise with the covered or overt intention to oppose the claims, power, and influence of the old aristocratic party called the Sadducees, which occupied high and influential positions in the Jewish theocracy. As they maintained their rights and privileges on the written

revelation, they naturally considered it to their interest strenuously to adhere to the very letter of this divine chart. The Pharisees' aim and object was, if possible, to wrest this right from them, and to diminish or destroy their power and influence, and this under the plausible plea of defending and upholding the people's religious and political interests. They consequently formed a democratic, political, and religious party—the people's party. Actuated by these motives, they claimed the right to be the true exponents of God's revelation, the guardians of the people's rights and interests, and the upholders of the theocracy. Under the pretext of having the people's most vital interests at heart, they interpreted the Scriptures often in a milder sense than their opponents did, but as they laboured under the delusion of possessing the right of reading the Scriptures as it seemed convenient to them, they soon multiplied religious laws and precepts, prohibitions and regulations, calling this "the making of a fence for the law." As they were themselves most rigid and austere in the observation of all the laws of Moses, of all the laws and enactments of their own inventive mind, called traditions, they were looked upon by the great mass of people with great awe and reverence, and considered the perfection of holiness and righteousness. The confidence and esteem they enjoyed among the people, the vast influence they exercised over them, worked very perniciously to their own character. They became proud, arrogant, and overbearing, believing in their own holiness and righteousness, and looking down with utter scorn or pity on the multitudes who were called

“the people of the land,” or the vulgar. Such a high opinion had they entertained of their sanctity, that they were ever anxious not to defile or pollute themselves by coming near anything they considered possible to have this effect. And whenever they considered themselves to have been thus polluted—which frequently enough happened—they underwent a purifying process, so that their opponents jeeringly said: “The Pharisees will perhaps try also to purify the sun.” With many of them it was but a sham, this over-scrupulous sanctity, a simple and unmistakable hypocrisy, an outward religious mask. In glaring contrast with these blind leaders of the blind, these whited sepulchres, these rigid formalists, who enjoyed such great reputation for sanctity among the people, stands the Publican, or Custom-house official. Even the Romans themselves have often enough complained of their rapacious greediness in exacting more than was their due, and they frequently have stigmatized them as robbers. In Judæa and Galilee the Publicans were looked upon as traitors to their country, and apostates from the Jewish faith, because in the service of the Romans, the oppressors of the country; and because the Jews considered it unlawful to pay tribute to anything but that which served a religious purpose. So strong was the Jewish feeling of contempt against these Publicans that they had no faith in them, would not receive their testimony in a court of justice, not even their alms or gifts laid on the altar. In fact, they were considered outcasts of society, shunned and avoided by every faithful Jew; hence, we often find them classed together with sinners. Pharisee and

Publican stood, at the time of Christ, in very much the same relation as the Brahmin and the Pariah in India. Pharisee and Publican ! the one held in the highest esteem, the other looked upon with the utmost contempt ; the one taking the lead in society, the other an outcast of society ; the one in the odour of sanctity, the other stigmatized as robber, traitor, and apostate. Pharisee and Publican ! the one belonging to a very powerful and influential religious and political party, the other to a class of people hated and despised. There was at the time of Christ but one opinion among the Jews respecting the high moral and religious character of the Pharisee, and but one opinion respecting the deceitfulness, the immorality, and irreligion of the Publican ; and yet Christ, the really holy and just One, who was beyond any party feeling, beyond conventionalism, beyond every national or social prejudice, associated with the Publicans, these outcasts of society, and recruited His followers from among them ; yea, had even one of them called from his Custom-house office to make of him one of His apostles. "They that are whole," says Christ, "have no need of the physician, but they that are sick ; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

II. Pharisaism, as represented in the New Testament, is the spirit of conceit, self-deception, pride, arrogance, hypocrisy, intolerance, and similar unvirtuous traits in the character and disposition of a man who pretends to be strictly religious. It is this which makes it so revolting to our moral and religious feelings, that men should have the audacity of asserting to be strictly religious whilst their life

and actions testify against them and their profession. We do not say that in every Pharisee was to be discovered such a long train of irreligious or immoral traits, nor do we say that all Pharisees, without any exception, were bad, or even satisfied with the outward routine of a religious life. There were, no doubt, some Pharisees who were much better than the system to which they adhered so tenaciously, but they must have been few in number and have belonged to the quiet of the land. Those with whom Christ and the apostles came into contact, were mostly distinguished and recognized by the spirit of Pharisaism we have described. Their life belied their haughty presumption. And we need not wonder at this. When men start with the idea that by their own actions they can attain to such spiritual perfection as to merit heaven's approval, this in itself will and must foster in them a spirit of pride and self-righteousness so antagonistic to the spirit of true and vital religion, which the religion of Christ imparts. When men exert all their ingenuity to find out meritorious acts to be done by which they think to attain to a high standard of sanctity, and yet direct, almost exclusively, their attention to the outward, to innumerable and minute regulations, prescriptions, and observations, the result will inevitably be that they will rest satisfied with the outward, that they will neglect the inward with its wants and necessities. And the Pharisees, as a body, did rest satisfied with the outward ; their whole religious life was made up of scrupulous attention being paid to an outward appearance of religion. They had undoubtedly imposed upon themselves a very hard task ; viz , to work out their own salvation, but

they somehow succeeded in getting accustomed to the heavy yoke they were daily called upon to carry. Constant exercise made the heavy burden light and easy, and when they had done all that Pharisaism required of them, they could even without hypocrisy ask, "What lack I yet?" Name him any new religious act to be done by which he can derive some merits, some new claim to heaven's favour, he will do it most willingly, for in the multiplicity of his ordinary religious engagements, it matters little whether the number is increased by a few more. The real Pharisee knows his creed by heart, and he can repeat it with the speed of a wheel driven by steam; he knows his daily routine of religious engagements; he knows when prayer is to be offered, when he is to make his libations, he is on the watch not to be defiled or polluted by contagion with certain persons or things; he washes scrupulously his pots and pans, that he and all he uses may be pure; he wears his broad phylacteries, and everything around him is in perfect accordance with prescribed rules. What does he lack more? At every minute of his life he can say: "I have done all the law of Moses and the traditions of the Fathers require of me!" Can we wonder that such a Pharisee has nothing but to thank God when he appears before Him in prayer? Can we wonder that he is proud in enumerating vices and crimes which he scrupulously avoids? Can we wonder that he does not omit to mention the good deeds he has done? He would not have been a true Pharisee if he could not boast of having even done more than was required of him by the law of Moses. He

was by no means a hypocrite, nor did our Saviour mean to represent him as such in this parable. He was, however, a self-deceived man, labouring under the dangerous delusion that religion consists in forms and ceremonies, and that he could, by strictly adhering to the tenets of his religious creed, and by scrupulously attending to all its requirements, attain to spiritual perfection. Considering himself to have done all that was required of him, in his self-deception, he felt it his religious duty to appear before the omniscient God and offer up a prayer of thanksgiving, which was in reality a eulogium spent on himself. He had nothing to confess, nothing to ask, for he is not aware of sin and transgression, and, consequently, needed not to ask forgiveness. He has reason to thank God that he belonged to the favoured sect or party who flatter themselves that they are able to say that they have acted in strict accordance with precept and regulations. To be thus happily situated, to belong to such a distinguished sect, fills the heart of the Pharisee with joy and rejoicing, and prompts him to thank God. And there remains only on the part of God to thank this Pharisee that he is such a good, just and righteous man. Pharisaism, however, as it is false and deceptive towards the man professing it, is false and deceptive towards God. The prayer of thanks emanating from the self-deceived Pharisee is the condemnation of a false and pernicious system.

III. Should the Pharisee and the Publican have been represented in the parable as having appeared before a judicial tribunal here on earth, we might have been pre-

pared to expect that the Pharisee would have been justified and the Publican condemned, for the one was known as leading an outwardly irreproachable life, and the other was in reputation of exacting more than was his due. A human judge is only competent to judge his fellow-man's life and actions as made known to him. The case must be totally different when both are represented as appearing before the Eternal Judge, who looketh deeper than man does, and who judges man, not as to what he appears to be, or what he considers himself to be, but what he really is, divested from all outward appearance. When man appears before his God, as he is represented in the parable, in the act of prayer, he is looked upon not as a Pharisee or Publican but simply as a man. Hence Christ, at the very outset, distinctly tells us in the parable that two men went up to the temple to pray, but as one of them was to be described as being so absorbed in his own importance and worth as not to realize the solemnity of standing before his all-seeing and omniscient God, he is stated to have been a Pharisee, and by way of contrast, the other is specified to have been a Publican. Pharisees or Publicans are looked upon by God only as men, and as such they are judged. Their position in life may be high or low, honourable or in evil repute; their life and actions may be approved or disapproved of by their fellow-men, when they stand before God they are but sinful, failing, and erring men, who are judged not merely by their sincerity and earnestness, but by the relation they stand in towards their God, and by the light and truth emanating from Him. The life and actions

of a man may be blameless, and merit the praise and admiration of his fellow-men, but God has a totally different standard of right or wrong from what man usually has. He judges the motives, principles, and dispositions of men, which prompt to action, and above all the relation they stand in towards Him. Here, in the parable, are two persons represented to stand before Him, who had both the same object in view, viz., to engage in prayer. They both wended their steps up to the temple, and both with the intention to pray, and both are really engaged in prayer, and yet the motives, principles, and dispositions were totally different. The Pharisee, considering himself a model of perfection, enumerates some of his good deeds; boasting of being free from some heinous crimes or vices, and congratulating himself upon his attainments, has nothing to do but to thank God. He notices the Publican in the act of prayer, smiting his breast in deep contrition of heart and soul, and yet he is daring enough to thank God that he is not like this repenting sinner, this Publican. Had this Pharisee felt and realized his sinful state as man, and as such, standing before his God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, he would, like the Publican, have enough to do with himself. Instead of turning his eyes to the Publican he would have cast them down, in the consciousness of sin and guilt, and implored in deep repentance pardon and forgiveness, as the Publican did. He is, however, not disposed to turn his eyes to his inward spiritual condition, for he labours under the delusion that everything there is perfectly right. He considered

himself just and righteous enough to measure himself with this poor, repenting Publican. Instead of praying, he actually sits in judgment on this Publican. In thanking God that he was not as other men, he particularly emphasises *even as this Publican!* What Pharisaical presumption and arrogance! What did he know of the man, except that he was a Publican. Could not one man be found, even among a class of men in evil repute, who nevertheless discharged the duties of his office in all honesty and justice? And could not this one be the praying Publican? And even if he was as bad as the whole class of men to which he belonged were, he stands now in a devout attitude before his God and Judge, and this ought to have imposed upon him silence. What could he have known of the man, but that he was not a Pharisee, not professing the same creed, not observing all the numerous ceremonies and precepts held binding by his sect. But alas! this is the curse of Pharisaism, Jewish or Christian, ancient or modern, that its professors are arrogant and presumptuous enough to sit in judgment on those who prefer to disagree with them. As they are vain and conceited enough to believe that they have everything perfect, a perfect creed, a perfect body of divinity, a perfect catechism, a perfect form of prayer and ritual to which they adhere, they must be considered as models of Christian perfection, and as such competent to judge others. Disagreement from them is condemned as heresy, separation from them is separation from the assembly of the saints. Plenty of such Christian Pharisees everywhere abound, and had they

the power as they have the will and inclination, they would even in our own much boasted time, persecute those differing from them. "Judge not, that ye might not be judged," is the warning Christ has given to His followers, and the true and earnest Christian, who lays more stress on a holy and godly life than on an exact and logical creed, or metaphysical definitions, will beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Christ, however, wants His disciples to be true men, true to God, true to themselves, and true to their neighbours, and if a man is thus true, he will constantly cultivate that heavenly, that Christian virtue called humility. True and vital religion is a life struggling unremittingly for more light and truth, for more holiness and godliness, for more conformity to the pattern of perfection set before us in Christ Jesus, who was meek and lowly of heart. A Christian thus struggling for divine life will have often enough to register sins, failings, and shortcomings, and have often enough to appear before the throne of grace in deep repentance, smiting his breast like the Publican and praying "God be merciful to me a sinner." The consciousness of our own sinfulness and the need we have of God's love and mercy in Christ Jesus will prevent us from drawing a Pharisaical comparison between ourselves and others, be they even Publicans; nor shall we feel any inclination to sit in judgment on those who prefer to differ from us. We shall, as true and living Christians, who live by faith in the Son of God, be humble, meek, and lowly in heart, soul, and spirit, and we have Christ's assurance that "Everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

XXV.

True Worship.

JOHN IV. 20-24.

"Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

I. The Saviour, to get out of the reach of the Pharisees, His implacable enemies, were it only for a time, was on His way to Galilee. As He was entirely free from every Jewish national prejudice, and felt only love and goodwill towards the whole of the human race, He took the shortest and most direct route, passing through Samaria, the inhabitants of which were in constant bitter feud with the Jews, and the Jews with them. Exhausted and tired He arrived at noon at a well, not far from Sychar, where He seated Himself down to rest. Hardly had He done so when a woman came, with a pitcher on her head, to draw water; and this woman was a Samaritan, with whom the Jews had no dealing. A woman and a Samaritan Christ had before Him. Will He condescend to speak to this heretic, this woman of evil repute? Were He a Pharisee, He would, at the very sight of a woman—and she a Samaritan—have left the well, in order not to be polluted by her presence. Were He indifferent as to the happiness or misery of mankind, He might have excused this, His in-

difference, by being too tired and exhausted to take much or any notice of the woman ; but the very sight of her makes Him forget all His fatigue, all His wants. He thinks only of the woman before Him, of the divine light and truth He can impart to her, of the true and lasting joy and happiness He can confer upon her. He saw in her not the woman of Samaria belonging to a race despised and hated by the Jews ; He saw not in her a woman of disreputable character ; he saw not in her an ignorant and superstitious woman, better left in this her questionable bliss ; but a woman made in the image of God, and, as such, capable of receiving divine light and truth, even the effulgence of divine light, and the deepest and most exalted truth ever propounded to man. He who knew what was in man knew better than others the sin and corruption that was in man, yet, in spite of this, He had confidence in man, even in the most degraded among them, publicans and sinners. He was convinced that He need only to bring divine truth before man, even the most ignorant and depraved, and the divine spark that is in man can be kindled into a sacred flame, lighting him on his path of duty towards God and man, and warming his heart and affection to love God and his neighbour. Christ knew that there was enough light in man to see and understand divine truth when brought before him. He habitually acted as if every man and woman had not only capability enough to understand divine truth, but also the capacity to receive it. He was convinced that the divine in man would not only assist him in understanding the meaning

and purport of divine truth brought before him, but also prompt him to receive it. Hence He trusted even the ignorant and superstitious with the most profound truth ever uttered by Him, and was not afraid that it would be misused or clothed in a form derogatory to it, for He knew the power of divine truth. He knew that truth has sufficient power in itself to burst asunder, sooner or later, all the false or rotten forms in which it may be put, and assume one more worthy of it, and better calculated to recommend it to the notice and acceptance of truth-loving men. Christ treated this poor, degraded Samaritan as if she were the best and purest of her sex ; He imparted to this illiterate and superstitious woman the highest truth, as if she were the most intelligent and best instructed person in the world. And this He did, because He considered all men equal in the sight of God, and as such one and the same truth for all men, however ignorant, degraded, or poor they may be. Truth alone can make man truly free, can alone raise and ennoble him, that was His firm conviction, and He was determined that every man or woman with whom He came in contact, should receive nothing of Him but the truth, the whole truth, yea, the most exalted and profound truth. How utterly different have philosophers and even divines acted in this respect in times past, and still act, in spite of the example the Great Teacher has set them. "Where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise," is a maxim which has often found advocates among them, who would have scorned the very idea of being considered ignorant or unwise. These advocates of ignorance and

stupidity have looked upon themselves as the favoured of heaven, the intellectual or spiritual aristocracy, destined to rule over the docile masses of ignorant mankind. There may be an excuse for the haughty pride and vain presumption of the philosophers who consider themselves the intellectual nobility, for their speculations may neither be intelligible, nor profitable to the masses. No excuse can, however, be given to those who consider themselves to be spiritual guides, pretending to be alone capable of solving divine mysteries, and claiming to possess all spiritual light and knowledge, not for the purpose of spreading such freely among the masses, but in order to usurp the right and authority of dictating to them what they have to believe or not. This is nothing but spiritual despotism, and ought to be resisted. Christ proclaimed equality of all men, without any distinction, in religious matters, and as such reveals to every man one and the same knowledge, light, and truth. The poor ignorant Samaritan woman was told who He was what He gives, and what the design and purport of His mission among men was and is. No privileged classes in the kingdom of Christ, no spiritual aristocracy, no priestly despotism and tyranny, but also no ignorance and superstition. Jesus saith unto her: "Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father. But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshipper shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him."

II. Before we undertake to implant in man's heart and

soul divine truth, it would recommend itself as wise and necessary, not only to know and understand the errors and falsehoods which are entertained instead of it, but to expose them as such. We cannot expect that truth would be acceptable to man, if we allow him to believe and cherish egregious errors and falsehoods in relation to the very truth we are anxious that he should accept. He would do this more readily if he is first convinced that what he holds to be so cannot stand the light of reason or revelation. A good husbandman will first of all till the ground properly, and clear it of all weeds before he sows the seed which is to bring forth fruit in due time. In like manner acted the divine husbandman, Christ ; His first act was, to remove prejudices and false or erroneous ideas from man's mind, before He advanced His truth, for He was ever anxious that His seed should fall on good ground. There were not only sins and vices to be removed from the heart and conscience of the Samaritan woman, but also egregious errors and falsehoods, which she shared with the rest of her nation. They were of old standing, dating back to the very time when these Babylonian colonists first settled in Palestine. In fact, these falsehoods made the Samaritan differ greatly from the Jew in reference to religion and religious worship, and were the real cause of all their strifes and quarrels. The children suffered thus for the sins and wrong-doings of their ancestors, because they stubbornly persisted in adhering to and defending a religious creed and worship their unscrupulous ancestors had framed and established without divine authority.

Ancestral usage was the only plea the Samaritans set forth in vindication of their worship rather on Mount Gerizim than on Mount Zion, as if long usage could make wrong right, error or falsehood to be held as truth. Long usages can indeed make us devoted and attached to an institution, to a mode of worship, to a spot held sacred, to traditions we revere, but if they cannot stand historical investigation, and if they prove not to be based on truth, but rather on mere presumption, the sooner we yield to this conviction the better. Life is too short and too serious to allow oneself to be duped by lying fabrications, however cleverly invented, and however much venerated by centuries of usage and devotion to them. It is, however, by no means a pleasant thing to be told that what we consider to be sacred ourselves and the nation we belong to, and what we and they have defended with so much zeal and love, is nothing but a cunningly devised fable, transmitted to us by our ignorant ancestors. This is, however, the price such misguided people have to pay for truth, and a very high price it undoubtedly is, to be required to tear oneself there and then from all we and our nation hold most sacred, and abide by the stern and uncompromising truth. The poor Samaritan woman manifested much enthusiasm and reverence for her great ancestors, for the worship on Mount Gerizim. "Our Fathers," she said, "worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Sentimental people would have said: "Do not destroy the poor woman's happiness. She believes she is right in worshipping there, where her ancestors

have done during so many centuries ; there where her parents and kindred, where she herself from her infancy had been in the habit of worshipping. She would not have spoken with so much pride and happiness of the sacred place, had she not derived much good from her worship there. Why would you be so cruel as to destroy the poor woman's peace and happiness?" This may all have been true and right as far as it went, but remember that, if there ever was one who had the most sincere love and sympathy for people in distress or perplexity, this one was, undoubtedly, Christ, man's best and truest friend. He would, assuredly, not have wounded unnecessarily the feelings of the poorest and meanest of men, much less robbed them of their true joy and happiness ; but He had too much respect for man, too much his best and enduring well-being at heart, to allow any one to believe in a falsehood, endangering his spiritual life and destiny. He was convinced that it was much better for every man to be told the truth at once, than to allow any one, with our knowledge and consent, to entertain dangerous falsehoods, perhaps one day discovered to be such when too late to mend. The poor woman solicited Christ's opinion respecting the dispute between Jews and Samaritans, as to the legality of each respective centre of national worship, and this He frankly and honestly gave her. The Jews, He had to tell her, were unquestionably right. Not Gerizim, but Jerusalem, had God appointed as the place where His people were to worship Him. "Ye Samaritans have mixed up with your worship many strange and impure things, so as to justify Me in saying: ye worship ye know not what."

III. The religious strife between the Jews and Samaritans, as to the legally appointed place where men ought to worship, is already at an end, was the startling revelation Christ made to the woman at the well. If they, however, should feel disposed to carry on this quarrel, they may do so ; but it has already lost its interest and importance. They may now worship on Gerizim, or in Jerusalem, or anywhere else ; for God is a Spirit, and as such fills the whole universe with His presence. Where man is with his wants and aspirations, where humble hands and hearts are lifted up in prayer and supplication, there is God, there is the temple of God. We cannot limit God to any particular spot, to Gerizim or Jerusalem, making of Him a local divinity, and ourselves His most favoured people. We cannot limit Him in space, for He is infinite ; we cannot assign to Him any particular time in the year, or any particular hour in the day, when He is more propitious to hear prayer than at any other, for He is ever ready and willing to hear and answer. God is a Spirit, says Christ ; yea, He is more than that, He is your Father because I am His Son, the Messiah and Redeemer of mankind. If ye have true and genuine faith in Me you are thereby placed in the relation of a child towards God, your Father, and wherever and whenever you approach Him as such, and pray to Him out of a contrite heart fervently, He will accept such a prayer, for it would be true worship in spirit and in truth. God is a Spirit, invisible and immaterial, impossible to be subject to our senses ; hence no mere outward forms or ceremonies must be deemed necessary

in furthering our communion with Him. Experience tells us that it rather diverts men's spiritual attention from realizing the solemnity of the act of worship, and may lead us to worship God in a formal manner only. True worship is, and ought to be, a spiritual act, performed within man's renewed and sanctified spirit; that spirit which feels and realizes the presence of the Great Spirit, with whom he holds secret communion. Those who have received the Spirit of Christ and are His, have within themselves a living temple, a true altar and sacrifice, where true worship can be held at all times and on all occasions, and have the promise of being acceptable to God. Of such it was that the Apostle Peter said: "Ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." Not on Mount Gerizim, nor on Mount Sion; not in Samaria, or in Jerusalem, or anywhere else is the Christian's spiritual house, but within him, as it is there where he has the true altar and sacrifice, and it is also there where God, who is a Spirit, is present, manifesting Himself as the hearer and answerer of prayer. And wherever two or three of Christ's true disciples meet, there He has promised to be in their midst, and this will constitute a Christian assembly, a Christian visible church. It is, therefore, not the *place* that hallows man, but *sanctified man* hallows the place. It is not a particular Church that has a right to claim to be the only true Church, in exclusion to every other, but it is the true and living Christian, with his living house or temple within him; wherever he meets with the same living stones as he the temple of God is built up, where man

ought to worship. And such true worshippers may be found in different churches and under different denominations, and all these living stones united build up the true Church of Christ, He being the foundation, the cornerstone. These true worshippers forming the true Church of Christ are the real and true representatives of the renewing power of Christ's religion on men's hearts, but as sure and certain as there are such true Christian worshippers forming the true Church of Christ, equally so, alas ! it is, that there are false and deceived worshippers forming a false Church, and so bring disgrace on Christ and His religion. The true worshippers, according to Christ, are those who worship God *in spirit* and *in truth*, hence, we are justified in drawing the inference, that the untrue or false worshippers are those who are not influenced by Christ's spirit, and are not in possession of the renewing power of His love and truth. They may be earnest and devoted in their worship, but this of itself will by no means make them true worshippers. Earnestness and devotedness is found also among heathens and superstitious people, among those who have no knowledge of Christ's religion, and never experienced the renewing power of His redeeming love, among those to whom we can say, what Christ said to the Samaritan woman, "Ye worship ye know not what." The true worshipper's characteristic is, that he is pervaded by the spirit of Christ, sustained and upheld by His truth, worshipping God in spirit and in truth ; "for the Father," says Christ, our highest and best authority in such matters, "seeketh such to worship Him." Amen.

XXVI.

The Homelessness of Christ and His Followers.

MATTHEW VIII. 19, 20.

"And a certain scribe came, and said unto Him, Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head."

I.—In our intercourse with our fellow-men, we are generally sustained and influenced by the conviction that a man's words and deeds are the expression of his thoughts and feelings, principles and motives. Social life would be intolerable, if not altogether impossible, without such a conviction, and yet, whilst we constantly seek it, we are nevertheless taught by experience to be on our guard, for we may be misled or duped. Words and deeds should indeed reveal man's thoughts and feeling, but this is not always done. Words may be employed to hide man's real thoughts, and actions may proceed from sordid motives. Could we know the motive by which a man is actuated in what he says or does, we should often judge him differently. When we, however, suspect anyone of sinister motives, we deeply regret that it is out of our power to enter into their hiding-place and drag them out by force. Even when no suspicion is pressing from us such a regret, the desire to know a man's secret motives, which we consider of importance and advantage to us, is frequently enough felt. The case is, however, altogether different when we ourselves are personally concerned. When we, for reasons known only to ourselves,

refuse to divulge our real thoughts or feelings, how often we have rejoiced that we were able to keep them secret. For good or evil, man has it in his power to keep to himself what he deems secret to himself; if resolved to do this, no rack or stake can wrest it from him.

It is true that there are some who have sharp, penetrating eyes, or so much knowledge and experience of mankind, that they can, to some extent, read almost correctly the secrets of man's heart, and judge correctly of his character and disposition; but, fortunately for the security and happiness of men, such men are exceedingly rare. There are, indeed, persons who are as transparent as crystal, and if they are not constantly on their guard, they will be exposed to annoyance and trouble. But by far the generality of men can so skilfully and perseveringly hide from the suspicion or notice of others all they think or feel—all that is really going on within them—that all our attempts to acquire correct knowledge of them will either be altogether fruitless, or, at the best, only result in mere guesses. Be this as it may, we have every reason to consider it a wise and beneficent arrangement of our Creator that He has not endowed us with the power of reading correctly each other's innermost thoughts and feelings. Had such a gift, or power, been granted us, social life would have been unbearable; society would, in fact, have been a tribunal of inquisition, and every member of it an inquisitor. Under such conditions, man would have been compelled to shun society and turn misanthrope. Even if our intentions were always the best, our thoughts always the wisest and most disinter-

ested, and our feelings always the purest and most sympathetic, which experience teaches us they are not, even then we maintain that social life would be intolerable and most painful to bear if we could get, unobservedly, access to the hidden secrets of another's heart, which he does not consider expedient or necessary to reveal. One there was, however, who knew man's heart with all its secrets, and that One called Himself the Son of Man, since His mission was to promote man's highest, best, and lasting interest. And this One is none other than Christ, the Saviour of man. He has been given by our Heavenly Father to the whole of mankind, to initiate and further their spiritual well-being, and consequently by Divine right the whole of the human family belongs to Him. To this High Priest of the human race was given to enter at all times into the innermost recesses of man's heart, not with a malicious intention of spying out our secrets and using them for selfish purposes, or to our disadvantage; but he possessed this Divine prerogative as our best and most disinterested friend. He desired to see in men coming to Him sincerity and honesty of purpose, and was anxious that they should have some clear and definite idea what they expected of Him were they to become citizens of His kingdom. He on His part would give them all the information they needed, and dispel from their minds all erroneous opinions they might entertain respecting Himself and His kingdom. If they, however, were not open and candid, but concealed their real motives in coming to Him, He gave them such an answer to the question put to Him as to leave no doubt on

their mind that they were well known to Him. They were, no doubt, startled to find themselves before One who knew what was in man, and could correctly read their secret motives. We have many such incidents recorded in the Gospels, and our text brings one before us. A Jewish Scribe came to Him and made the exorbitant promise of being willing to follow Him whithersoever He goes. He had not the remotest idea what this his promise really implied. He had been for some time in the crowd that accompanied the Saviour during His wanderings in Galilee, and perhaps thought such a roaming life very interesting and adventuresome. Hence he wanted to attach himself closer to Christ, become one of His constant disciples, and follow Him whithersoever He goes. From the answer Christ gave him we can almost with certainty know that the man, in spite of his exorbitant promise, was not prepared to hear that from the moment he becomes really a disciple of Christ begins, in reality and truth, a life of self-denial for him.

II. The answer our Saviour gave the Scribe is clothed in an imagery taken from the animal kingdom. "The foxes," He told him, "had holes, and the birds of the heavens have their nests (or rather their lodging-places), but He, the Son of man, hath nowhere to lay His head." Even the animals, Christ meant to say, have their homes where they can retire and be at rest, but He who belongs of divine right to all men, is in reality homeless. This is the plain meaning of the words. And we ask, in what sense did Christ desire the Scribe and us to understand

His homelessness. Now homelessness is not always identical with poverty or indigence, however often we may find it so in life. With many callings is connected a wandering or homeless life, and yet we may not be justified in saying of the man pursuing such a calling, that he is poor or indigent. The divine mission of the Saviour required of Him not to have a permanent home, but to wander through towns and villages of Palestine in order to proclaim that the Kingdom of God was at hand and that He was the Founder of it as well as the Enlister of men to it. Also His apostles had no fixed home, their calling imposed upon them the duty of travelling from one country or place to another to preach the Gospel of Christ. What we generally call poor, that, indeed, the Saviour was as well as his apostles, for they had no earthly possessions. And yet they had always what they needed. If the Saviour during His public ministry had nowhere a settled home, we must not from this conclude that He had nowhere found a hospitable retreat, for this would be contrary to the reports recorded in the Gospels. It was indeed of rare occurrence and most surprising to his disciples, when, in a village of Samaria, the inhabitants refused to give Him shelter. The indignation of the apostles and their revengeful proposal would be incomprehensible had they often experienced such examples of inhospitality. But that even Pharisees and others gave him a hospitable reception, is confirmed by the Gospel narrative. The Saviour, as we have already said, had no settled home, but we may confidently affirm that He ever found a shelter or retreat wherever and whenever

asked. Let us also not forget that Judas had the bag—was, in fact, His treasurer—and all the requirements could, in case of need, be purchased ; and yet it is true that Christ was homeless, found nowhere a real resting-place, where He could lay down His sacred, weary, and troubled head in peace and security. Wherever He came, never did the place invite Him to rest ; on the contrary, He everywhere had ample opportunities and inducements for work. And He was ever strongly impressed with the absolute necessity of making the best use of the time allotted to Him. It is the most surprising contrast between the rest of the soul and the restlessness of life which we observe in the appearance of our Lord during His whole public ministry. In the Gospels we find frequent mention made that He desired a quiet and undisturbed hour, were it only for His disciples. They had no leisure even to eat, as the multitudes were ever thronging Him. And wherever He went multitudes had already arrived before Him. The peculiar work the Father gave Him to do, and which, out of compassion and love for the human race, He undertook and carried out, that of necessity gave Him no rest. Faithfully to carry out the divine commission everywhere and at all times and seasons, this did not allow Him time for rest. He had compassion on the multitude, whose Saviour He was, and again the multitude thronged Him in every place and at every hour. Wherever He was, as the Divine Physician and the great Teacher, He could not allow anyone to go away without having either received some help or some instruction. Even when He could retire for a few hours

and be by Himself, the great object of His holy life was ever uppermost in His mind. And this great and divine scheme to carry out, this it was that did not allow Him to lay down His sacred head in peace and rest. He only found that rest on the cross, when He breathed out His last words : "It is finished." As long as He carried on His self-denying work He could nowhere find rest or security. It is true, that wherever He went He was watched by spies and persecuted by foes ; yea, even where He found a willingness to acknowledge Him as the Teacher and the prophet sent by God, He was nevertheless, as the Christ of God, obliged to endure offence, to hear contradiction, and carry on painful controversy. So long as He sat at the Pharisee's table as a mere guest He had peace, but as soon as that sinful woman approached Him, and He began, as the divine Physician, to heal her broken heart, He was not allowed to rest in peace. Herein we find His real homelessness, that although He might be acknowledged to be a just and righteous man, a benefactor of man, yea, even a great prophet, yet rarely was He acknowledged and received as the Saviour of the lost without suspicion and violent opposition, and, consequently, there was not on earth, there was not among men, a place to be found where the Son of Man could lay His head down as the Saviour of the world.

III. The Saviour gave the Scribe to understand that none can be His disciple and follower without being constantly exposed to a restless life, without carrying on a perpetual warfare, and practising self-denial. We have, in-

deed, in believing in Christ peace for our soul, because the peace of God is ours, yet this very peace is the cause of the Christian's restlessness. By faith we have apprehended Christ, but in our actual life He is at an immeasurable distance in advance of us, and it is that faith we have in Him which presses us to follow after Him with all diligence, "to make our calling and election sure." In proportion to the strength of our faith is also that of our haste; the degree of our inward peace corresponds with our outward restlessness, and our faith, as the ground of our soul's rest, does not permit us any rest to the sole of our feet. Where there is no living faith, there, of course, is this Christian restlessness wanting, and where there is a dead faith, there will be also the immobility of death, for there will be no works of faith, no constant pressing forward toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Where there is no living faith, there are no Christian graces and virtues to be cultivated, and therefore no Christian uneasiness felt. The possession, however, of such heavenly gifts, and the care to preserve and augment them, will by no means allow the real Christian to lay down his head in ease, much less in indifference about them. A living faith does always endeavour by the help of God's Spirit, to realize the high ideal set us by Christ, and this of necessity requires of us a constant pressing toward it, a constant coming nearer to it, that we may be made conformable to the image of Him who is our pattern and ensample. Perfect Christians we cannot have here on earth, but the true believer in Christ is all his life-

time always on the way to become one, is always progressing in holiness and godliness.

The great Apostle Paul felt this Christian restlessness most keenly when he declared : " Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect." Although in such a high position, the apostle did not consider himself in any way above any ordinary Christian, but exhorts all Christians to be in this of the same mind with him, saying : " So run that ye may also obtain." Every true disciple of Christ, therefore, never can be exempted from that Christian restlessness we are speaking of ; and never can allow himself to rest satisfied with that he has already obtained, but he will, and must, as a brave soldier of the Cross, carry on in right earnest a constant warfare against foes within and without, and hence fight the good fight of faith every step he takes heavenward. The believing Christian not only is concerned about his own spiritual condition, but most assuredly also respecting that of his fellow-men. Their spiritual destitution, be they Jews or Gentiles, will not allow him in Pharisaical self-complacency to rest satisfied that he is not like this or that publican and sinner. We can indeed purchase a certain kind of rest, but only through the neglect of most sacred and binding duties and obligations which we owe towards God and man. When, however, we are fully alive respecting these duties and obligations, and boldly and fearlessly bear testimony to the truth of Christ's religion, we shall experience the same opposition and enmity as our blessed Master, and will also not be allowed to lay down our own weary head undisturbed as Christians. When we really and truly

are daily weaned from the frivolities and vanities of the world; when we sincerely and faithfully fight the good fight of faith against foes from within and without, and when we, by God's grace, strive unremittingly after holiness and godliness, and are fully conscious that every step we take brings us nearer to our eternal destiny, then we shall realize what all the faithful at all times have realized, viz., that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, and are seeking after a better country; that is, a heavenly. We shall, as believing Christians, realize this Christian homelessness in a palace as well as in a humble cottage, in riches as much as in poverty, surrounded by dear friends and relatives, as when standing alone in this wide world. When we shall have run our race, finished our course, it is then we shall, in the better, the heavenly country, rest from our labours, for "there remaineth a rest to the people of God." This is the believing Christian's greatest consolation, this his most cheering hope. There remaineth an eternal, blissful rest for the restless, fighting, and self-denying Christian; the never-ending Sabbath-rest in glory. When our work here on earth is finished, then heaven's Sabbath-day will dawn upon us; and when we shall have fought the good fight of faith we shall obtain the prize—everlasting life. Let us, therefore, labour to enter that rest.

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Fürst, A

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